

WORKING WHITENESS: PERFORMING AND TRANSGRESSING
CULTURAL IDENTITY THROUGH WORK
Allessandria Polizzi, B.A., M.A.

Dissertation Prepared for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

May 2002

APPROVED:

Scott Simpkins, Major Professor
Diane Negra, Committee Member
Timothy Parrish, Committee Member
Brenda Sims, Chair of Graduate
Studies in English
James Tanner, Chair of the
Department of English
C. Neal Tate, Dean of the Robert
B. Toulouse School of Graduate
Studies

Polizzi, Alessandra, Working Whiteness: Performing And Transgressing Cultural Identity Through Work. Doctor of Philosophy (English), May 2002, 206 pp., 6 illustrations, references, 53 titles.

Early in Richard Wright's *Native Son*, we see Bigger and his friend Gus "playing white." Taking on the role of "J. P. Morgan," the two young black men give orders and act powerful, thus performing their perceived role of whiteness. This scene is more than an ironic comment on the characters' distance from the lifestyle of the J. P. Morgans of the world; their acts of whiteness are a representation of how whiteness is constructed.

Such an analysis is similar to my own focus in this dissertation. I argue that whiteness is a culturally constructed identity and that work serves as a performative space for defining and transgressing whiteness. To this end, I examine work and its influence on the performance of middle class and working class whiteness, as well as how those outside the definitions of whiteness attempt to "play white," as Bigger does. Work enables me to explore the codes of whiteness and how they are performed, understood, and transgressed by providing a locus of cultural

performance. Furthermore, by looking at novels written in the early Twentieth century, I am able to analyze characters at a historical moment in which work was of great import. With the labor movement at its peak, these novels, particularly those which specifically address socialism, participate in an understanding of work as a performative act more than a means to end.

Within the context of this history and using the language of whiteness studies, I look at how gendered whiteness is transgressed and reinforced through the inverted job-roles of the Knapps in Dorothy Canfield's *The Home-Maker*, how work can cause those who possess the physical attributes of whiteness to transgress this cultural identity, as the Joads in *The Grapes of Wrath* demonstrate, and how the ascribed identities as non-white for Sara in *The Bread Givers*, Jurgis in *The Jungle*, and Bigger in *Native Son* are by far more compelling than their performative acts.

Copyright 2002
by
Alessandria Polizzi

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my family for providing all that was required to finish this project. First and foremost, I thank my husband, Kevin McClanahan, for devoting so much time and energy and FOR enduring the financial hardships required for me to complete this dissertation and the degree that it represents. For over ten years of marriage, he has supported me toward this ultimate goal. My family, particularly my mother, Suzanne Manning, and my grandmothers, Grace Kaye Polizzi and Evelyn Barile, also provided much needed emotional and financial support while I worked on this project.

I would like to thank Dr. Scott Simpkins for working with me so diligently on this dissertation. He was willing to work with someone who he had never met before, let alone had previous academic experience.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Ericsson, Inc, which provided for my tuition during my employment. While this degree in no way relates to the work I perform at Ericsson, my managers, Susan Sanchez and Mark Kelly, enabled me to complete this lifetime goal by approving the funding of my degree. Furthermore, the support of my many coworkers made the completion of this dissertation possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Chapter	
1. TREATING HER WHITE: INVERTING GENDER AND RACE PERFORMANCE IN DOROTHY CANFIELD'S <i>THE HOME-MAKER</i>	19
2. "WE AIN'T FOREIGN:" CODES OF WHITE PERFORMANCE IN JOHN STEINBECK'S <i>THE GRAPES OF WRATH</i>	58
3. NOT YET AMERICAN: WHITE PERFORMANCE AND EUROPEAN IMMIGRANTS IN ANZIA YEZIERSKA'S <i>THE BREAD GIVERS</i> AND UPTON SINCLAIR'S <i>THE JUNGLE</i>	97
4. "A WORLD AND LIFE OF HIS OWN" MURDER AND WHITE PERFORMANCE IN <i>NATIVE SON</i>	139
CONCLUSION.....	175
REFERENCE LIST.....	202

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure

1. "Joseph P. Kennedy and His Family: Kathleen, Eunice, John F., Jean (left); Robert F., Patricia, Edward M., Rosemary, Joe, Jr., and Rose Kennedy (right), 1938. Louis Fabian Bachrach. *Photographed by Bachrach: 125 Years of American Portraiture*. Douglas Collins. New York: Rizzoli, 1992 63
2. "Bonnie Dell Gardner, 1946." *Disfarmer: The Heber Springs Portraits 1939-1946*. Julia Scully and Peter Miller. Danbury, New Hampshire: Addison House, 1976 63
3. "Vernon and Martha Rice with Verna May, Doyle and Otis." *Disfarmer: The Heber Springs Portraits 1939-1946*. Julia Scully and Peter Miller. Danbury, New Hampshire: Addison House, 1976 65
4. "Unidentified." *Disfarmer: The Heber Springs Portraits 1939-1946*. Julia Scully and Peter Miller. Danbury, New Hampshire: Addison House, 1976 65
5. "Comparison: From a Barbach Advertising Portfolio, 1928. Louis Fabian Bachrach. *Photographed by Bachrach: 125 Years of American Portraiture*. Douglas Collins. New York: Rizzoli, 1992 67
6. "Children of Rehabilitation Clients, Yakima, Washington, 1936." Arthur Rothstein. *Portrait of a Decade: Roy Stryket and the Development of Documentary Photography in the Thirties*. F. Jack Hurley. Louisiana State UP: Baton Rouge, 1974. 67

INTRODUCTION

From their contribution to the construction of whiteness, they [white workers] gain not only economic rewards (higher wages and the cleaner, lighter and/or less dangerous jobs), but also a 'psychological wage (a 'deference' manifested in racial privileges and a social status that is always higher than African Americans). The 'psychological' wage affirms a meritorious white identity composed of inherent cultural characteristics (not just white skin) which make special privileges appear natural rather than socially determined and allocated (58).

Venus Green. "Gendering Whiteness in the Bell System, 1900-70."

"I want to do what other people do . . . Mr. Max, a guy gets tired of being told what he can do and can't do. You get a little job here and a little job there. You shine shoes, sweep streets; anything . . . You ain't a man no more. You just work day in and day out so the world can roll on and other people can live" (326).

Bigger in *Native Son* by Richard Wright

People working for pay is a common conception of work. But a job is more than a means to an end. It is a daily act of cultural identity, a role we play. Who we are is, indeed, more than a name embroidered on our chests or embossed on a business card. However, our cultural labels, our ascribed identities, deeply influence the performances inherent in our work. Work, therefore, becomes more than a paycheck at the end of the week. Work takes on a deeper meaning, a way of marking us within the culture at large.

Whiteness and work are inextricably linked. For some, as Venus Green points out, work reinforces the privileges of whiteness, while others are confined by certain kinds of work because they are not white, as Bigger's monologue demonstrates. Whiteness is performed and transgressed through work and provides cultural currency for the American worker. On the one hand, workers serve as part of the capitalist labor system, providing labor for services, earning their paychecks. On the other hand, workers fulfill their cultural roles through work, with all the advantages and disadvantages these positions provide. Work affords workers a "psychological wage," whether a deterrent or a benefit, that complicates their cultural position.

It is such a wage, the payment for a cultural performance of whiteness through work, which is my focus. I contend that work is a site of cultural disruption, a performance through which culturally ascribed identities culminate. While these identities are enforced and transgressed through the performance of work, they are also more clearly recognized through the working act. The five novels discussed here represent ways in which whiteness and work interact. Through the examination of Dorothy Canfield's *The Homemaker*, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, Anzia Yezierska's *The Bread Givers*, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, and Richard Wright's *Native Son*, I discuss how whiteness is performed and transgressed through work.

The study of race is a fundamental area of inquiry in modern critical studies. From the fetishized other through post-colonialism to the images of people of color in literature to the recovery of non-traditional writers and writing, race is a constantly growing and ever-rich area of study. My analysis endeavors to take part in this tradition, albeit from a less conventional vantage point. Where the more widely used implications of race examine those outside the norm, this analysis focuses on the race in the center: white. As Richard Dyer notes, "there is something at stake in looking at, or continuing to ignore, white racial imagery. As long as race is something seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people" (1). My goal here is to examine the constructions of whiteness in order to deconstruct its marking as normalcy and in order to make whiteness a more visible construction of privilege. It is my contention that such an analysis will destabilize the sense of whites as non-raced, further exposing race as a cultural construction.

In order to begin this endeavor, one must first ask, what is whiteness? To most, whiteness is absence, the act of normalcy. Whiteness is what the other aspires to. Whiteness in this context fails to take on a presence in our understanding of race. For my discussion here, however, whiteness is not merely the absence of ethnicity; it is a

performance all its own. Dyer notes this distinction, as well:

Whites are everywhere in representation. Yet precisely because of this and their placing as norm they seem not to be represented to themselves as whites but as people who are variously gendered, classed, sexualised and abled (*White* 3).

Whiteness exists as a cultural performance of racial identity. While its visibility is more nebulous, taking the time to examine its construction and performance gives insight into the place whiteness dominates in racial dynamics.

One of the more common ways in which whiteness is understood is in its performance of privilege. Reading this privilege is problematic, however, because it causes a certain fear in giving cultural currency to such acts. My analysis of whiteness is equally concerned about turning the lens upon the center. Dyer articulates the sensitivity that must be given to studying whiteness. For those who participate in this discussion:

it is risky, and potentially dangerous, work to do because it can easily be misinterpreted. If it is read within the frame of ending oppressive social practices, whiteness studies can serve as an effective way of challenging white power and dominance. This work can also be read as serving oppressive forces by

refocusing attention and resources back toward the center (*White* 187).

According to Dyer, many problems can arise out of analyzing whiteness:

Writing about whiteness gives white people the go-ahead to write and talk about . . . [themselves] . . . Related to this is the problem of 'me-too-ism,' a feeling that, amid all this (all this?) attention being given to non-white subjects, white people are being left out . . . A third problem about whiteness is guilt. The kind of white people who are going to talk about being white, apart from conscious racists who have always done so, are liable to be those sensitized to racism and the history of what white people have done to non-white peoples" (10-1).

In opening the floodgate to "me-too-ism", those who examine whiteness must be aware of causing a potential problem down the line. The white cultural critic who looks at whiteness runs the risk of being deemed a racist. However, by turning a *critical* eye toward whiteness, its effect on cultural identity is further revealed as something more than "normal" American existence. In so doing, the assumptions of privilege and power that are at the core of whiteness begin to deflate.

Defining what whiteness is often depends more on what whiteness *has*. As John Hartigan notes in "Establishing the Fact of Whiteness:"

whiteness specifies the cultural construction of . . .
a structural position of social privilege and power .
. . The phrase *white culture* is proffered to convey
the material relations and social structures that
reproduce white privilege and racism in this country
(496).

Within the confines of this definition, to be privileged is, in a sense, to be white. While it is true that to use privilege as a definition of whiteness is too simplistic, those who perform the acts of privilege without the benefit of the physical attributes of whiteness are often deemed to be "acting white." In *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture*, Valerie Babb also recognizes the fundamental element of privilege whiteness has: "whiteness is more than an appearance; it is a system of privileges accorded to those with white skin" (Babb 9). Recognizing this system of privilege is one step toward understanding how whiteness is constructed, but analyzing how characters try to participate and articulate this status as privileged further reveals the intricacies of white performance.

Another mode of examining the complexity of whiteness is to investigate its relation to the other in order to

articulate its definition. In *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, David Roediger notes that, for early American workers, "'civilization' continued to define itself as a negation of 'savagery'-- indeed, to invent savagery in order to define itself" (22). Toni Morrison also discusses the influence of Africanism on the construction of white American identity in literature. In her collection of essays, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, she remarks that

black slavery enriched the country's creative possibilities. For in the construction of blackness and enslavement could be found not only the not-free but also, with the dramatic polarity created by skin color, the projection of the not-me (38).

Hartigan also recognizes this trend to examine whiteness against the other in literary analysis:

Film and literary critics' . . . view of whiteness [is] as a relational identity, constructed by whites defining themselves as unlike certain ethnic or racial others. In this view, blackness serves as the primary form of otherness by which whiteness is constructed (196).

In such a binary viewpoint, whiteness is what otherness is not. To examine what is white is to look at how what is othered differs from whiteness.

While an examination of whiteness juxtaposed against otherness is essential, the fundamental focus for my study is how this juxtaposition is complicated by the performance of whiteness through work. As Warren describes it, this form of critique gives further insight into how race identities are constructed:

the very construction of racial categories is a performative accomplishment, in which, through enactment, individuals and groups of people constitute the very categories that were created in the first place. So, it is through performance that our very understanding of race (as a system made up of arbitrary race identifiers) comes into being (Warren 195-96).

This is true for my area of interest here for I see work as a performative act, and therefore, as a locus of cultural eruption.

Performativity, in this sense, positions cultural behaviors as representative of cultural identities. As she describes it in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, "one's social constitution takes place without one's knowing. Indeed, one may well imagine oneself in ways that are quite to the contrary of how one is constituted" (31). The working act, then, serves as a performance, a series of behaviors that make up a character's ascribed identity. This daily performance is,

according to Warren, one of the more fruitful topics of discussion in understanding whiteness:

Performative work in whiteness studies is beginning to uncover [how whiteness is manifested within different locations and sites], but more work in this area must be conducted. It would be interesting to see more microanalytic work that seeks to uncover what whiteness looks like in everyday life (Warren 200).

As an "everyday" task, work provides a microcosm of performativity, thus answering Warren's call for further analysis of such areas of daily life.

Furthermore, read within the socio-political context of early Twentieth-century America, work and whiteness take on even greater significance. This was a time in which work was playing a particularly important role in the political moment. Labor movements were growing in strength, gender roles were reeling from the aftermath of the first wave of modern feminism, and racial lines were beginning to blur with the onslaught of European and Asian immigrants and the beginnings of racial integration for freed blacks. All of these changes came to a head in the workplace. As Peter Kivisto notes in *Immigrant Socialists in the United States*, "the American landscape during the late 1880s and early part of the present [Twentieth] century can be seen as center stage for a drama of disruption and creation" (15). Within the epicenter of social and political unrest was the

issue of work, for each of the roles under construction (race, class, or gender) culminated on the job. The workplace was the breeding ground of cultural chaos.

This level of change was particularly true for the divisions between black and white; as freed blacks began to gain social status in the working world, race became more and more blurred. As Roediger notes, after the end of the civil war,

white workers could never see African-Americans or themselves in just the same way . . . , [but] it was ridiculous for African-Americans to expect to work alongside whites in skilled jobs and criminal for them to take the jobs of whites during strikes (177-78, *Wages*).

Working alongside the other, whites were forced to contend with racial similarities, as well as differences. This destabilized cultural division. As James Weldon Johnson notes in the 1935 *Negro Americans, What Now?*, "the world today is in a state of semi-chaos. We Negro Americans as a part of the world are affected by the state" (3). This state of chaos, while arguably still in existence, blurred the lines of difference, causing whiteness to become less stable through the integration of the working world.

Furthermore, the onslaught of immigrant workers into the U.S. destabilized the definition of whiteness within the context of work. The increase in the number of

different types of white people made the very definition of whiteness unstable. How can whites be a race based only on skin color when so many different cultures possess the same physicality? "The period of mass European immigration, from the 1840s to the restrictive legislation of 1924," notes Matthew Jacobson in *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, "witnessed a fracturing of whiteness into a hierarchy of plural and scientifically determined races" (7). Irish, Polish and Italians, while Caucasian to the eye, were reclassified into non-white categories. Such an attitude is clearly demonstrated by Wilbur C. Abbot's comment in the 1925 *The New Barbarians*:

Our unskilled labor, in particular, is largely recruited from peoples alien not only to the original stock which settled and developed this country, but to the bulk of the later additions. It is sometimes said that our English ancestors were only earlier immigrants. That is not true. There is all the difference in the world between a pioneer and an immigrant; between northern and western Europe, and southern and eastern Europe, to say nothing of Asia Minor (224).

Abbot's need to divide Europe reflects a desire to define whiteness. This division created a hierarchy of whiteness, more than the color of skin could provide. Consequently,

the assumed superiority of the "white" European gained strength.

As the workforce grew and industrialization from the mid to late 1800s became a part of everyday life, work gained in importance. The concept of work shifted from craftsmanship to acting as a cog in the wheel of industry. In this new work paradigm, one's place in the working world became as important as one's role was in the village community. In essence, the workplace became the public space. This new performative stage, giving rise to labor activism, sharpened the focus on one's working life. In *Ideology and the Rise of the Labor Theory in America*, John DeBrizzi describes this time as one of a cultural shift for the American worker and middle class: "during this period, the autonomy of the worker and the ideals of the middle class were consistently threatened and brought into question" (57). No longer rulers of their own destiny, the white middle class were more and more defined by work rather than class, a distinction which made race and work even more important performances in their daily lives.

It is within this context that I use work in my analysis. Work is a cultural act, not only a mode of survival but a form of identity for the characters I discuss here. Work takes on both monetary and cultural significance because it forms and articulates class and cultural identity and transgressions. Employment determines

masculinity or femininity. Types of labor are designated strictly along racial lines. Class is maintained by work (or the absence of it). Work serves as an act of one's cultural identity, either transgressing whiteness, as it does with the Joads in *The Grapes of Wrath*, or reinforcing whiteness, as it does with the Knapps in *The Homemaker*. For those positioned outside whiteness, such as Sara in *The Bread-Givers*, Jurgis in *The Jungle*, and Bigger in *Native Son*, work is perceived as a way to bridge the gap, to actually become white.

One thing that makes work so interesting for the study of cultural performance is that it is a necessity for survival for all of the characters discussed here. As Tony Watson notes in *Sociology, Work, and Industry*,

work is basic to the ways in which human beings deal with the problems arising from the scarcity of resources available in the environment . . . , [and] the social organization of work will reflect the basic power relationships of any particular society (82).

These power relationships, defined as they are by work, are not only essential for the physical survival work affords but also for the cultural significance of the working act.

Tied as it is to power relationships, employment choices are limited based on ascribed cultural identities. In other words, working roles reflect cultural roles. "If the working-class are 'constructed', they are not assembled

with complete freedom from a limitless range of possibilities" (ix), as Peter Alexander and Rick Halpern describe it in their Introduction to *Racializing Class, Classifying Race: Labour and Difference in Britain, the USA, and Africa*. One's working act is limited by one's ascribed identity. Whiteness, then, opens up the playing field, availing the white worker of not only the cultural privileges of whiteness but the privilege of choice.

Work is perceived as a mode for attaining whiteness. The drive toward work reflects the desire to obtain the idealized status of the middle/working class. As Wai Chee Dimock in "Class, Gender, and a History of Metonymy" describes Marxism's take on this vision of the working-class, "if capitalism was that monstrous machine whose 'parts are human beings,' class was that organic body within which those 'human' parts could once again be united into a political whole" (73). Work enables individuals to be part of this body politic.

The work available, however, can sometimes destabilize one's ascribed identity. In some cases, the work found in order to earn enough money to eat often further alienates the worker from the norm. Whites in traditionally non-white professions, for example, call their whiteness into question, giving rise to an instability of whiteness. As such, their work transgresses their culturally ascribed identities.

Work serves as a mode for performing and transgressing assigned identities. Work becomes the stage upon which these roles are encountered and fought against. These performances are cultural roles, categories which are reinforced daily. As Judith Butler tells us in *Bodies That Matter*, the performative occurs in the repetitiveness of types. This is

a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through the constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape and production (95).

The threat of ostracism, the fear of starvation, these anxieties bolster cultural performance, further reinforcing the importance of the correct working act.

The novels chosen for my analysis run the gamut of white performance. In *The Homemaker*, for example, the struggle to define gender roles through work occurs at the center of white performance, taking for granted the privileges contingent to their race. Because the novel is otherwise aware of cultural assumptions of gender roles and work, its inability to call into question whiteness provides a good backdrop for the novels which follow. For within this novel, we see how white privilege is utilized to transgress gender norms.

The instability of this privilege is further examined in the chapter about *The Grapes of Wrath*. Whereas the characters in *The Homemaker* can take middle class whiteness for granted, the Joads lose their grasp on this privilege and are forced to face the aftermath of their transgression. Their precarious position on the outskirts of whiteness causes their entire identities to come into question, a position which they respond to by more strictly enforcing the rules of whiteness. By maintaining gender roles and the fundamentals of middle class ideology, such as independence and hard work, the Joads try to rebuild their white identity.

The creation of white performance is the focus for the following chapter. By looking at how two European immigrants, Sara in *The Breadgivers* and Jurgis in *The Jungle*, attempt to attain whiteness through work, the building blocks of this cultural identity are revealed. Unlike the Joads, whose whiteness is transgressed through work, Jurgis and Sara see work as the gateway to normalcy. What they learn, however, is that this role cannot be so easily attained.

This lesson is one Bigger must learn in *Native Son*, as well. In Bigger's mind, the privileges inherent to whiteness are equivalent to attaining white identity. As such, he attempts to gain these privileges and thereby enter the world of whiteness. Unlike Sara and Jurgis,

however, Bigger does not appear white; but like these two, he learns that his ascribed identity, within the confines of a hegemonic culture, will not allow him to attain whiteness. While he may attempt to transgress this identity, he is ultimately unable to do so.

Examining race by focusing on white performance, I may seem as if I am segmenting race from other forms of cultural identity. Such an act would be quite similar to the cube theory described by Frederick Cooper in "Categories, Boundaries, and Connections in the Study of Labor." Cooper sees our common understanding of race, class and gender in the three-dimensional form of a cube. "If one saw . . . each dimension of the Big Three as binary . . . , then we have three dimensions with two positions each, giving rise to a model of society as cube . . ." (215). Far from segmenting the "Big Three" in the way Cooper describes, using work, particularly work which transgresses the norm, enables a layering of cultural identity. Through examining the working performances of different characters with different roles, Cooper's cube, with its flat sides of cultural definition, becomes more a mixed up Rubic's cube with the different colors of identity confused and playing against one another. Work, in essence, scrambles our divisions, destabilizing and reinscribing identities, and ultimately highlighting the issues inherent within their

performance. As an everyday act with a monetary, cultural and psychological wage, work gives us this insight.

CHAPTER 1

TREATING HER WHITE: INVERTING GENDER AND RACE PERFORMANCE IN DOROTHY CANFIELD'S *THE HOME-MAKER*

The novel *The Home-Maker* takes as its starting point the assumption that the self is often confined by cultural expectations. In the brief article used as the foreword to the 1980's printing of the novel, Dorothy Canfield discusses how traditional marital roles confine who the person essentially is:

We could realize that every human being is different from every other, and hence each couple of human beings is different from every other couple; and, within limits of possibility and decency we could leave people free to construct the sort of marriage that is best for their particular combination (vi).

Canfield's vision of marriage is integral to *The Home-Maker* because it relies on this assumption of an essential self. With its true desires and needs, the essential self causes the characters in Canfield's novel to switch gender roles. The male character becomes the homemaker and the woman

character becomes the breadwinner because the duties involved with these responsibilities fulfill an inner desire within them. In so doing, Canfield renders an inversion of the very roles by which she is frustrated. Canfield does not conceptualize these roles as cultural performances but as a series of duties and desires that each marriage requires.

However, the inversion of these roles and the methods by which the characters perform in their new, yet gendered positions, bring to light the nuances of their performance. As Marion Rust states in "Speaking of Olaudah Equiano," these performances foreground "what is *between-between* origin and enactment, body and gesture—calling into question all such fixed ways of determining identity" (23). In disrupting the surface and bringing out the "between," the Knapps balance the line of gendered performance in inverted bodies. Consequently, these gender roles are constantly in flux.

What Canfield seems to be less aware of is the Knapps' whiteness. By ignoring their race as part of the Knapps' cultural identity, Canfield creates a dichotomy between which social performances are in question and which are not. As such, the individual preferences for wife and

husband at issue in the novel gloss over the issues of race inherent in their construction. As Peter Carafoil notes in "'Who I Was': Ethnic Identity and American Literary Ethnocentrism," such a lack of awareness about race brings to light questions about "what the construction of the ethnic [in this case, white] self within the larger hegemonic culture suggests about the integrity . . . of our own cultural identities and the institutions we construct around them . . ." (44). These performances bring to the surface the questions of gender the author describes as the purpose of the novel in its introduction while further destabilizing the fictions and centrality of whiteness.

The Home-Maker is a novel about performing gendered whiteness. While their normalcy is constantly in flux, the characters in *The Home-Maker* are never presented as and never conceptualize themselves as anything other than white. Their status as non-raced and the novel's lack of awareness about this positioning give the reader an understanding of whiteness and work by further exploring the cultural center. The fact that the novel can question and invert gender roles without acknowledging the whiteness of the characters gives us insight into whiteness' permeation. The ability to merge the social

consciousness of class, gender, and minority (often couched in the terms of race) issues with an understanding of the definitions and assumptions of whiteness is far from common in popular texts like *The Home-Maker*. These novels participate in the assumed culture at large: the middle class. This inability to step outside cultural norms by addressing racial privilege is highlighted by the cultural norms that are brought into question in the novel. In other words, by closely examining gender and work, *The Home-Maker* further define whiteness.

As touched on earlier, the characters in Canfield's novel struggle within categories of gender, particularly within the gender roles prescribed to a husband and wife. As the novel opens, the Knapps live unhappy lives in these roles. The wife, Eva, is tense and unnerved most of the time and struggles to keep herself under control, while her husband, Lester, plods off to work in an unfulfilling job as an accountant at Willings' Department store. The couple and the town itself constantly comment upon Lester's failure to provide enough money to support his family. While no one but Lester articulates it, Eva's anger and frustration with her role as homemaker makes her family tense and nervous.

All of this changes when Lester is fired from his job and attempts suicide by "accidentally" falling off a neighbor's roof while trying to extinguish a house fire. His accident does not kill him but injures his spine so that he is temporarily confined to a wheelchair. When Lester becomes an invalid, Eva is forced to find work at Willings' Department store as a salesperson while Lester takes on the responsibilities of the home. Both husband and wife are successful and fulfilled in their new roles. Because of their satisfaction, happiness spreads to the children, whose ailments clear up in their new blissful home.

In order to examine how Eva and Lester are able to fulfill their work desire within the context of performing whiteness, we will first look at the roots of the unhappiness with their traditional roles and then analyze how their new roles are able to bridge the gap between desire and cultural performativity. Once we understand the differences between the positions before and after Lester's accident, we can flesh out how white performativity is an integral element in their work desire. In other words, we will look at how their new working roles support the

characters' understanding of whiteness, a state which ultimately leads to their happiness.

"To represent people is to represent bodies," states Richard Dyer in *White* (14). As whiteness is written on the body, so too are these characters' dissatisfaction with their cultural performances. Their unhappiness blossoms through their bodies. Eva has patches of eczema and Lester suffers from dyspepsia. Even the children are marked by the Knapps' cultural failure. The eldest son, Henry, has bouts of stomach flu, while Mattie and Stephen display psychological ailments. Mattie is quiet and nervous, but Stephen explodes in fits of anger and rebellion. All of the Knapps, from Lester to Stephen, have physical and mental eruptions that stem from the lack of inner fulfillment the parents receive from their cultural performances. In a sense, their physicality fails them because they lack the ability to marry cultural performativity with desire.

Canfield clearly uses these physical eruptions as representations of emotional dissatisfaction. Eva's "last straw" festers on her skin as her anger and dissatisfaction torture her inside. The doctor's inability to properly treat these ailments further clarifies them as emotional eruptions on the body. Their bodies wear their mental

anguish by failing to provide normative performances. In their illness, their performance as middle class degenerates. As one cultural commentator, Mrs. Prouty, states in the novel, "Mercy! What a sickly-looking man! Bent shoulders, hollow chest, ashy-gray skin . . . no physique at all, And the father of a family! Such men should not be allowed to have children" (83). To this outsider, this reader of the text of Lester's body, Lester is culturally unfit for his social responsibilities.

Examined in the context of their whiteness, the failures of their bodies can be read as participating in white normativity, albeit in an inverted sense. When Lester gets ill, he turns whiter and whiter. However, the traditional gender role of weak female and strong male is inverted for the Knapps. As Diane Price Hendl describes it in *Invalid Women: Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction and Culture, 1840-1940*, "for nineteenth-century women, illness represented feminine refinement, wealth, and leisure; it was a condition to which women aspired" (152). Lester and Henry suffer from weak stomachs, while Eva's excema is more repulsive. Women were normally perceived to suffer from, as Alphonso Lingis terms it in *Foreign Bodies*, "maternal weaknesses and liabilities," and to be

susceptible "to vapors, fevers, miasmas, . . . fainting spells, . . . long bouts of bedriddenness, [and] enigmatic female ailments" (64-65). However, it is the men in the Knapp family who take on this role of illness. This inversion of traditionally gendered white illness destabilizes the Knapps' cultural positions. Although these characters wear the body of success through their whiteness, the only way to mark them as other is through sickness. In their bodily weaknesses, the Knapps slip in their white performances.

Their failures are not only signified through the body but through their self-perceptions, as well. Both Eva and Lester shame themselves for failing in their assigned cultural performance. Early in the novel, we see how unhappy Eva is with her work. As she looks around the house, she thinks to herself: "What was her life? A hateful round of housework, which, hurry as she might, was never done. How she *loathed* housework! The sight of a dishpan full of dishes made her feel like screaming out" (47, italics in original). Lester also thinks often of himself as a failure: "he was no good; that was the matter with him—the whole matter. He was just no good at all—for anything" (78). Lester thinks this even before losing his

job. Once he is fired for being incompetent, his attempted suicide is his solution to the economic situation he has created for his family, an act which is the catalyst for the novel because it causes his injury and frees Eva from the bonds of housework.

Lester's opinions of Eva's homemaking were not always focused on Eva's dissatisfaction. Lester sees Eva's unhappiness with her role as a reflection of his own failures, as well. Before his injury and the couple's exchange of gender roles, Lester contemplated Eva's failures to perform as a homemaker:

Lester never doubted that his wife loved her children with all the passion of her fiery heart, but there were times when it occurred to him that she did not like them very well—not for long at a time, anyhow. But, like everything else, that was probably his fault, because she never had a rest from them, because he had not been able to make money enough. Everything came back to that (71).

Lester reads Eva's failure as a homemaker, and ultimately as a mother, as his own deficiency. In his mind, her unhappiness is a result of his inability to provide enough money.

The question arises: enough money for what? The Knapps have a house and enough food to eat. They never complain of clothes that are too small or worn out. Since Lester's reading of his wife arises from her inability to "take a rest" from the children, Lester thinks having enough money is defined by not having to take responsibility for the care of the children. Eva and the members of her social group also see this housework as beneath her. She feels compelled to explain that "our circumstances don't permit us to hire help." In different, that is, more wealthy, circumstances, Eva could separate herself from her work as a homemaker. This understanding of motherhood is dependent upon the Knapp's status as white, particularly when we consider the novel historically. For a middle class white family in the 1920s, child care by someone other than the mother was a viable option. Lester's inability to provide this for his wife makes him a social failure and pushes the Knapps to the margins of the middle class.

Thus situated, Lester also perceives his failure as a breadwinner as an assault on his and his wife's whiteness. "A man who couldn't make money had no rights of any kind which a *white man* was bound to respect—nor a *white woman* either. *Especially a white woman*. The opinion of a man who

couldn't make money was of no value, on any subject, in anybody's eyes" (73, emphasis added). Lester clearly understands that cultural expectations are based on his whiteness and his failure economically and socially is dependent upon his race. He lacks value in the white world because he fails to perform as culturally expected. The implications of the last statement, "especially a white woman," and the intricacies of Lester's happiness as an emasculated homemaker in opposition to his sense of failure as a white worker need to be carefully considered.

Read within the context of their whiteness, Lester is, as he calls himself, "a blank" (85), a non-performing member of the white middle class. Unable to fully participate, which is defined by his economic and bodily failures, Lester has no cultural currency. In fact, he is treated with animosity by his peers and is basically pitied by his own children. His economic failure and physical ailments destabilize his whiteness, causing him to slip from his performative identity. Fundamentally, Lester's lack of fulfillment in his work causes his racial performativity and acceptance to fade. This is not to say he is no longer white, but he is no longer treated as a

white-collar white male. He becomes disassociated because of the implications of his failed work fulfillment.

In stating that he is unworthy and undeserving of white respect, Lester puts into words the expectations placed upon him because of his race. This statement intimates that Lester believes that, were the opposite true, were he black (and thus his peers so as well), he would not have the pressure, at least in his own mind, to perform as a money-earning citizen. Let me take a moment here to distinguish between working and earning money. Work is often coded as freedom, according to Roediger in *The Wages of Whiteness*: "white urban workers connected their freedom with their work" (330). In Roediger's reading of whiteness, work is the essential element for freedom. But not so for Lester. Lester sets up a division between work and success. Lester is working, but he is not successful. Making money means more than having the bare necessities to survive; it is the ability to have power in one's life. It is to participate in what Dana D. Nelson calls the fraternity of white manhood in *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men*. At the turn of the twentieth-century, this fraternity, imagined or not, served "as a corrective to the abrasions

of that workday, a haven where a man could be truly recognized apart from his competitive working-role, could be rightly known in his individual particularity" (*Manhood*, 78). In order to participate in this fraternity, Lester must first be able to perform effectively as a working white man. Lester is not out of work when he chides himself for being unable to gain white respect. His failure (and what ultimately causes him to lose his job) is his inability to earn "enough" money to enable a white performance.

Lester understands his disassociation from white normativity. In fact, the labor he detests is often compared to slavery. This feeling echoes that described by Roediger, in which he states that, during indentured servitude in colonial America, "a large body of whites could imagine themselves as slaves--and on socioeconomic, as well as political, grounds" (*Wages* 31). Lester sees his responsibilities in his job at the office as a "slavery to the clock" (68), quite a different analogy than one that compares the physical exertion the slave and manual laborer experienced. But this analogy is not based on the physical labor of the slave. Rather, it compares Lester's internal and metaphysical constraints with those of the spiritual

impediments of those controlled completely by another by seeing this control as the "passive intimate negative opposed to every spontaneous impulse" (68). In his mind, the demands made upon him by structured work hours are like a slave master, whipping him awake from his daydreams.

This reading uses slavery as the other against which white work is compared. As Roediger contends, "the bondage of Blacks served as a touchstone by which dependence and degradation were measured" (*Wages* 20). In seeing himself aligned with the slave (and the degradation and dependence therein), Lester demonstrates how he perceives his sense of being as restrained. It is from a position of white privilege that Lester can see his place in a white-collar job as closely aligned with that of the laboring slave. Lester is clearly setting up a binary paradigm by comparing his situation as a white man with the demands made on the slave.

Lester bases this belief on the assumption that he deserves freedom but is shackled, yet his use of the analogy rings false. No demands are made upon his body; no whip waits for him in retribution for tardiness. "In short," Roediger comments about this often used comparison, "white servitude was a problem that could be and was

conquered both at the social and individual level in a way that Black slavery was not" (*Wages* 32). Lester's ability to control his own destiny is an unspoken given in the analogy. Although he feels confined by his job, his whiteness provides privileges unavailable to the slave. Lester's failure in white performance, then, lies in his inability to take control over his own destiny and body. All of this changes, however, when Lester becomes disabled and takes on the job of homemaker.

As he becomes a homemaker, Lester's fear of slavery is projected onto his children. In Lester's mind, they too are like slaves in that they are completely vulnerable to the whims of their parents. Lester never abandons his internalization of this dichotomy. Rather, he sees his new position as that of a powerful slave master instead of the slave he believed he once was. When Stephen begs his father not to wash, and thereby destroy, his Teddy bear, Lester is

horrified at the position in which he found himself, absolute arbiter over another human being, a being who had no recourse, no appeal from his decisions. It was indecent, he thought; it sinned against human dignity, both his and the child's . . . "As I would not be a

slave, so I would not be a master!" he cried to himself . . . (173).

The exchange between Lester and his son, Stephen, is a pivotal point in the novel, particularly in the development of Lester's character, for this is when the evolution from a failing white performance to successful one becomes more evident. For Lester, his realization that he has complete control over another human being is upsetting, but he takes this as his duty and vows to "fight for Stephen as Stephen had been ready to fight for Teddy; he, Lester, who had never felt that he had the right to fight for anything of his own" (173). This realization of responsibility for and control over someone other than himself empowers Lester and makes him intent upon getting better: "for the first time he desired to get well, to live again" (179). Before this episode, Lester had wallowed in pain and self-pity. Now that he has someone to protect, someone who needs him, Lester finds a reason to live.

This pivotal point in the novel is where Lester makes the transition from failing at work and even at taking control of his life (via his attempted suicide) to successful homemaker competently in charge of not only his own life but the lives of his children. This movement

toward fulfilled desire is dependent upon Lester's ability to perform within the cultural codes of whiteness. How Lester achieves this goal is not through embracing these codes but in rearticulating the roles of white masculinity within the context of his new job and body. Through his disability and his work, Lester takes on an alternative role of white masculinity and thereby achieves both a successful cultural performance and a feeling of fulfilled desire.

If we read this inversion within the context of his whiteness, we are better able to understand how it is fulfilling for Lester. Doborah McDowell's reading of white masculinity in "Pecs and Reps: Muscling in on Race and the Subject of Masculinities" is particularly helpful here, for she understands its performance as contingent upon such inversions: "From every angle, [critics] show that white heterosexual males—long granted power and privilege as the unraced, transcendent norm—live their whiteness, in Eric Lott's resonant turn of a phrase, 'by impersonating racial others'" (362). While her analysis applies to racial inversion, the same can be said of the gendered inversions in which Lester and Eva participate. By inverting gender roles, Lester and Eva are better able to perform as white.

But, it is not this inversion, per se, that makes Lester happy in his role as homemaker. It is also the access he has to his children and to the molding of their minds and personalities that pleases Lester. Throughout the novel, many references are made to Lester's earlier dreams of becoming a professor. Lester devotes much of what had been for Eva a silent time of frustration and sanitization into a music- and poetry-filled classroom for his children. As his daughter, Helen, describes it:

Father often told her poetry as she stepped to and from. The kitchen seemed to her just chock-full of poetry. Father had said so much there the walls seemed soaked with it. Sometimes in the evening when she went in just before she went to bed to get a drink of water or to see that the bread sponge was all right, it seemed to her, especially if she were a little sleepy, that she could hear a murmur of poetry all around her, the way a shell murmurs when you put it to your ear (210).

Lester shares his poetic sensibility with his children, schooling them in literature and philosophy. Where before he was silent, now "he seemed to feel, the way she did, that it was easier to talk about things you cared awfully

about when you were working together" (211). While Lester tried to share what he thought at his previous job and was met with contempt, Lester's children, his co-workers in some sense, delight at the attention and complexity of their father's educational and artistic spirit.

In this position, Lester has all the power and nowhere to fall. He cannot fail at homemaking the way he did in the business world because there is no one there to fire him. No one rules the home but himself. Lester takes joy in this stable status. "'He that is down need fear no fall, / He that is low, no pride,'" Lester recites to himself (186). In this quote, Canfield shows the reader that Lester understands that socially, as disabled and a homemaker, he is marked as on the periphery of masculinity. He has become just like the injured men Joanna Bourke describes in *Dismembering the Male*: "the fit man, the potent man rendered impotent" (38). The rendering of a man who once had potential, a potential which he failed to live up to, as now impotent removes the shame of failure by erasing the lure of the possible. Coded as disabled, as invalid, as unable to participate in the culture at large and thereby invalid in the masculine paradigm, Lester enjoys the freedom of an inability to succeed or fail.

This new position as invalid male gives Lester the ability to reclaim his sense of masculinity. As such, Lester participates in what Dana Nelson calls "male sentimentalism" in "'No Cold or Empty Heart:' Polygenesis, Scientific Professionalization, and the Unfinished Business of Male Sentimentalism." While Nelson uses this term to analyze fraternal organizations and virginal male mediums, Lester's disabled body fits the sentimental aesthetic at the heart of Nelson's analysis:

Quite differently from practices of female sentiment in the antebellum era, which worked to interiorize and individuate women, male sentimentalism worked to relieve men of the requirements of individuality that professionalism demanded. Instead, practices of male sentiment afforded men moments of (carefully guarded) communalization (32).

Lester's new role provides him with the benefit of a relief of "the requirements of individual." In fact, it is once he positions himself as an invalid that Lester can come to terms with his own masculinity.

While he questions his own manhood and sense of self when he fails to perform in his male role as breadwinner, Lester never questions his masculinity once he takes on the

role of homemaker in his new invalid body. Rather, he is proud of his ability to learn homemaking and child rearing. When Aunt Mattie questions the appropriateness of his performing duties like darning socks, he asks, "Do you know what you are saying to me, Mattie Farnham? You are telling me that you really think that home-making is a poor, mean, cheap job beneath the dignity of anybody who can do anything else" (199). Lester elevates housework because of his participation in it and develops a greater sense of self because he is able to perform appropriately in that role. Once freed by his disability to play the role of homemaker, Lester finds happiness.

What further complicates this position is that, as we learn as the novel progresses, Lester's disability is not a physical one. Lester is not paralyzed, which he learns as he reaches out to protect his son from a falling candle's flame. However, once he learns of his cure, Lester does not abandon his wheelchair. Rather, he continues to feign paralysis. In doing so, Lester is participating in the tradition of faking illness to avoid work, what Bourke terms "malingering" in her analysis of World War I soldiers. "Malingering," says Bourke, "was simply another response to the public responsibilities of masculinity"

(77). Lester's performance as disabled enables him to own his body. "The malingerer's weapon was his body . . . [His] protest *centered* in his body. Often, it was the last remaining thing he could claim as his own" (Bourke 81). Through his disability, Lester takes control of his body, thereby giving a power over his own destiny and life that he lacked in his performance as white-collar worker.

Beyond this, however, Lester provides an outlet for his alternative masculinity. In feigning paralysis, Lester is able to maintain his new role as a male homemaker. Were he to acknowledge that he had gotten better, were he to possess an intact and whole male body again, he would, at least in his own mind and within the context of normative masculinity, be forced back into the role that was previously unfulfilling to the point of suicide. In pretending that he has no feeling from the waist down, Lester is able to reconfigure himself as on the margins of masculinity rather than as a failed normative male.¹

¹Lester creates a subconscious female body for himself by conceptually removing his genitalia through his paralysis. Because he cannot feel anything below the waist, Lester becomes, in essence, half man and half woman. The top half is the masculinized version of Lester, while the bottom half is the lack of the female body.

This seemingly dichotomous position reveals the complexity of examining white masculinity, as Richard Dyer notes in "White Man's Muscles:"

It is the ability to pass themselves off as not particular that allows them [men] to go on being, within the regime of representation that they produce, 'invisible.' We have learned to see the generality of white masculinity even while respecting the historicity and textuality of any particular manifestation of it (289).

His position as invalid enables Lester to participate in a job role that better defines him as masculine and white.

As discussed earlier, Lester's masculinity is defended because of its placement in the role of homemaker. This is shown quite clearly in the following scene:

He wheeled himself over to the table and took out of a work-basket a pair of Stephen's little stockings which he prepared to darn. Mattie turned, saw what he was doing and pounced on him with shocked, peremptory benevolence. 'Oh, *Lester*, let me do that! The idea of your darning stockings! It's dreadful enough your having to do the housework!'" (198-99).

This scene of darning socks in which the emphasis is on the masculine in the form of "Lester" and "your," further points to the specificity of the job he is doing. As Lester quickly notes in retort to Aunt Mattie's comments, "Eva darned them a good many years . . . and did the housework. Why shouldn't I?" (199). Despite his new role as observed, Lester owns this realm because of the very masculinity being challenged within it. As he clumsily wheels himself through his kitchen, his masculinity is contrasted against this feminine backdrop.

This further highlights Lester's masculinity by positioning him in the center of a feminine sphere rather than in the masculine environment he previously occupied and failed to perform in. "When men's bodies are put on display," as McDowell comments,

the traditional codes and conventions of who sees and who is seen are contravened Thus, it should not go unnoticed that while we read accounts of white male exhibitionism . . . , the white male never fully relinquishes his hold on spectatorship, nor on its privileges and powers (365).

Lester is made more masculinized by functioning in a feminized realm, and his ability to perform as such is

facilitated by his white privilege. Such seemingly tangential elements converge to construct a more successful white masculine performance than Lester was able to provide before.

The fact that his happiness is contingent upon such a performance must not be overlooked. Lester clearly finds more worth in his new position than he did in his white collar world. His malingering is treated with a sense of awe and respect in the novel. Chapter 19 of the novel is devoted to the discovery of the importance of Lester's disability to the success of the Knapp family. This investigation is performed by Aunt Mattie, the character who at first was appalled by Lester's participation in house-work and who has served as the voice of popular cultural expectations throughout the novel. As Aunt Mattie interviews Lester, Eva and the Knapp children, she uncovers their fulfillment and their ability to perform within the cultural norm as a result of Lester's disability. All the members of the family are physically healed and seem happy. Lester and Eva even state that Lester's "accident" has spawned their cures.

Aunt Mattie finally turns to the doctor to see if this situation will need to change via Lester regaining

mobility. When the doctor tells her "I really believe I can cure him" (275), Aunt Mattie responds by crying and imploring "Oh, *Doctor!*" (275). Her outcry prompts a very significant but unspoken (even by the narrator) exchange between the doctor and Aunt Mattie: "From her eyes, from her voice, from her beseeching attitude, from her trembling hands, he took in her meaning—took it in with a tingling shock of surprise at first. Then with a deep recognition of it as something he had known all along" (275). What he had known was that Lester must not be healed; the happiness and successful cultural performance of the Knapps depends on it. His cure would destabilize the normalcy they currently possess.

We can also not forget that his decision and ability to feign paralysis comes from a place of privilege. The doctor's visit that closes the novel blesses Lester's performance with societal approval. As Bourke notes in her analysis of World War I malingerers, the medical establishment devoted much time to "identifying groups of men who were regarded as least trustworthy. This took many forms—from the ludicrous claim that colliery managers should regard men wearing earrings with misgiving, to the sweeping assertion that certain ethnic groups were

untrustworthy" (90). As a white man, Lester has the ability to choose his own performance. As discussed earlier, the doctor is clearly aware that Lester is malingering, but he has chosen to participate in the charade in order to enable his normative performance to continue. We can see the doctor's decision to lie as the doctor informs Eva that Lester is permanently disabled: "When he finished he looked very grim and disagreeable, and, opening his case once more, began to fumble among the bottles in it. God! Why did any honest man ever take up the practice of medicine?" (319). The doctor's frustration at lying for Lester is over-powered by his willingness to perpetuate Lester's feminine but successful performance.

To make the cultural inversion of her characters complete, Canfield also renders Eva as less and less traditionally feminine as the novel progresses. When Eva starts out as a sales person in Willings' department store, she takes to it very well, so well that the young owner, Mr. Willings, is amazed. Eva's work performance is constantly compared to the expected and provided performances of her female coworkers. "She's learned her stock quicker than anybody you ever saw," remarks her supervisor, Miss Flynn (136).

With her success, Eva's new role, like Lester's, is reconfigured along gender lines by those who observe her. Just as Aunt Mattie is horrified at the feminine nature of Lester's new job as homemaker, the cashier at the restaurant Eva frequents comments "that she folded her morning paper and put it under her arm with the exact gesture of any other business-man" (154). In order for the characters to conceptualize Eva's new position, they must align her with the masculine. Like Lester, however, Eva manages to create an alternate gender reality for herself. While her gestures may appear more masculinized to the outsider, her femininity further enhances her economic success. Her job is a feminine one (a point which will be discussed in greater detail later), but her success at her job is attributed to an underlying masculine work ethic. By repositioning herself outside traditional femininity, Eva is propelled into working opportunity and success.

Furthermore, Eva is better able to perform as a white collar worker than Lester was because she sees her job as an extension of herself. Rather than seeing the demands made upon her by her job as intrusions on the self as Lester did, Eva sees them as opportunities and valiant possibilities. As Christopher Wilson comments in *White*

*Collar Fictions: Class and Social Representation in
American Literature, 1885-1925:*

the new emphasis on employee responsibility reflected the idea that clerical employments—sales, bookkeeping, accounts, writing letters to clients—necessarily involved a particularly close identification between the corporate entity and the employee, between job and person. In this new 'family,' the persons in sales, those who kept accounts, those who generated ink, became the public face of the corporation, not just its personnel but its personae (33).

Eva functions in this new family with more enthusiasm and ability than she ever did in the family home she created. Where once she was the face of the Knapp family the town saw, now she is the representative of the ladies' apparel department, an honor which provides a feeling of pride where once there was shame.

Eva's performance is contrasted against the sensibilities of her feminized husband. As she begins to settle in her new role as worker, her capitalist ideals become more and more strong. She reads the morning paper while eating breakfast so she can see the store's advertisement, for example. In Eva's mind, these are

"positively as good as a story—better than most stories because there was no foolishness about them . . . [That morning's ad contained] a little story about the wonderful way in which American ingenuity had developed kitchen conveniences! Good patriotism, that was, too" (151). While capitalism is not necessarily a masculinized trait, Eva's interest in such details surrounding advertising is starkly contrasted against Lester's reaction to the same thing earlier in the novel:

Jerome Willing's business ideal, as Lester saw it, was to seize on one of the lower human instincts, the desire for material possessions, to feed it, to inflame it, to stimulate it till it should take on the monstrous proportions of a universal monomania (76). Whereas Lester feels dirty and vulture-like when he thinks of capitalist selling practices, Eva feels "pride in the store embracing all departments" (152) when she reads these ads and thinks about their impact on the public.

Eva's success is also highlighted against the failure of her colleague, Miss Flynn, a distinction which is based upon racist stereotypes. Miss Flynn, for example, is immediately dismissed as overly dramatic because of her "Irish blood" (140). "Miss Flynn had that objectionable

habit of playing favorites among her girls—the Irish were so personal anyhow! No abstract ideas of efficiency and justice” (139). Because of her Irishness, she is “not really Grade A” (139) and will not be promoted to assistant manager.²

However, competent because of her ability to perform as white, Eva is seen as more successful than Miss Flynn. As Ruth Frankenberg tells us in *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters*, “Beginning in the 1920s, a new clustering of concepts gained currency: race difference came to be named in cultural and social terms instead of, or simultaneously with, biological ones” (13). Participating in this aesthetic, the narrator notes that Miss Flynn is racially unable to be as “polished” as she needs to be to become assistant manager of the department store. Since her “Celtic tongue” is too flattering and that “some of the silent country women who come in here go away without buying anything because they think Miss Flynn is

²For an historical discussion of the Irish immigrant and their movement from other to white, see *How the Irish Became White*.

trying to make fools of them," she is seen as racially incapable of performing correctly.

However, before she even steps on the sales floor, Eva has the inherent potential to ascend to management. Mr. Willing notices her "vigorous and swift" gait and admires her voice when she first interviews for the job. Mr. Willings treats Eva very carefully, conscious of her insecurities and her desires because he sees management potential in her immediately. Lester notes this treatment in his discussion with Aunt Mattie: "What with her commissions on extra sales, she's making just about what I did. With the promise of a good raise soon. *The Willings have treated her very white*, I must say. And I imagine she is the wonder of the word as a sales-woman" (195, emphasis added). On the surface, Lester is noting that Eva has been treated properly. However, this begs the question, what is proper treatment? It clearly is not to treat Eva as the Willings have treated Miss Flynn. To treat Eva properly, to treat her white, is to give her the respect she deserves as a white woman. Lester's comment clarifies that Eva's treatment by her employer, her immediate placement into the category of management material, is contingent upon her position as a white woman.

In fact, as the novel progresses, the husband and wife management team of the department store manage to run off Miss Flynn in order to make Eva more successful. When Mr. and Mrs. Willing call her in to the office to tell her that "Miss Flynn has just told us that, because of changes in her family affairs, she will be leaving us next month" (255), they are telling her that her time has come to take her cultural role. And Eva is not surprised by this information: "She knew everything that he would say before he said it—all except the salary! What was certainly more than Miss Flynn had ever had! And to begin with!" (255). Eva compares herself to Miss Flynn and sees that she has moved ahead. Miss Flynn must return to her family, but Eva can participate in the new family of her job.

The whiteness of the customers is an important element in the progress of Eva's career. It is Miss Flynn's inability to relate to the store's customers that is presented as the reason for her leaving the company. When examined more carefully, this emphasis on the customer further highlights the differences being noted between the white normativity of Eva and the foreign/non-white inappropriateness of Miss Flynn. As referred to earlier, the Willings read Miss Flynn as incapable of treating their

"country women" customers appropriately because she flatters them too much and makes them feel like fools. Yet, by their own admission, this audience of customers has "an inferiority-complex right down to the marrow of their bones" (257). And why wouldn't they, when the very management that disapproves of flattering them thinks that "even the best of women see things in a little, narrow, concrete way" (258)? Such a group of people would be difficult for anyone to please.

The Willings think that Eva will be better able to perform in their store because she is taking on the role that participates in the reproduction of whiteness. Her cultivated whiteness will "help every fine big farm-boy to shuck off his awkward countrified ways that put him at such a disadvantage beside any measly, little, cock-sure tenement-house rat" (259). Eva's successful performance of white normativity marks her as able to train others to perform whiteness as well as she. Whereas Miss Flynn is of the same race as the "tenement-house rat" in question, Eva can school her customers in the intricacies of acting white, thus reinstating their superiority over foreigners, coded non-white, like Miss Flynn. It is the American, coded white, customer they choose to train in the intricacies of

performing normative whiteness. As Eva describes it, "what I want the store to be is a little piece of the modern world at *its best*, set down within reach of all this fine American population around us" (259). Taken from the foreign Miss Flynn, Eva's job as supervisor is not only the sale of what whites/Americans should wear but the teaching of white normalcy. In buying the right clothes, these customers are better able to perform as white.

Performing successfully in their racial roles, Eva and Lester's physical ailments subsist. What would cause their illnesses to disappear based on Eva and Lester's ability to perform successfully in inverted cultural roles? If their sicknesses were a result of normative slippages, wouldn't this inversion of gender roles cause these bodily eruptions to continue? Not if their cause was based on their inability to perform within the cultural expectations of whiteness. Once their working roles are inverted, these bodily inversions are no longer required. "In every society," Judith Lorber tells us in *Gender and the Social Construction of Illness*, "the symptoms, pains, and weaknesses called illness are shaped by cultural and moral values" (1). The cultural and moral values Lester and Eva were responding to were their failure to find fulfillment

in the gender roles assigned to them. If we look closely at how illness functions and how it is cured, we see that the Knapps' bodies are healed by their ability to act out the cultural normalcy written on their skin.

If we understand illness as Robert Hahn describes it in *Sickness and Healing: An Anthropological Perspective*, we can see that it is "a condition of the self unwanted by its bearer" (14). Under such a definition, there are, according to Hahn, "four interrelated aspects of sickness found in all settings: (1) accounts of sickness, (2) sickness experiences, (3) sickness roles and institutions, and (4) causes of sickness" (14). For our analysis, the last two serve to further demonstrate the importance of whiteness in healing Lester and Eva.

Their ability to perform white normativity makes them more comfortable in their new cultural performances. By strengthening their gendered performances, Lester and Eva are better able to perform as white. This cultural success heals their bodies. It is as if in embracing their whiteness and performing the cultural roles written on their bodies appropriately, Lester and Eva's physical ailments are cured. H. Brody in *Stories of Sickness*, further chronicles the distinctions of sickness as:

to have something wrong with oneself in a way regarded as abnormal when compared to a suitable chosen reference class, . . . to experience both an unpleasant sense of disruption of body and self and a threat to one's integrated personhood, . . . to participate in a disruption of an interated hierarchy of natural systems, including one's biological subsystems, oneself as a discrete psychological entity, and the social and cultural systems of which one is a member (quoted in Hahan, 20).

To read Eva and Lester within the context of Brody's definitions is to see their sickness as eruptions of cultural transgression.

In fact, when these new roles are threatened, illness returns. Eva sees Lester move his legs while sleeping, and "everybody at the store was sure, the next day, that Mrs. Knapp was coming down with some serious malady She had a look of death-like sickness that frightened the girls in her department" (285). When faced with the possibility of returning to her previous life, Eva's body begins to fail her once again. Therefore, maintaining the facade of Lester's disability is essential for their physical healing.

If, as Diane Hendl puts it, in early twentieth-century minds, "illness is the punishment for making wrong choices" (167), Lester chooses his disability as a cure to his cultural failures as well as the physical nausea that previously haunted him. Looked at within the context of the historical moment in which the novel was written, Lester and Eva see illness as a mark of failure. This is a different understanding of illness than previously existed historically. According to Hendl's reading of literature and popular culture at the time this novel was written, the early twentieth-century was a turning point in conceptions and representations of sickness. But when this shift occurred is not quite clear: "It is impossible, therefore, to pinpoint a moment when the public image of illness gives up its romance or takes on its association with poverty" (15). *The Home-Maker* straddles both positions, using illness as a mark of artistic and effeminate sensibility in the case of Lester but also sees hard work rather than rest as the cure.

The effectiveness of white performance in *The Home-Maker* brings to the forefront the issues of normative whiteness. The efficacy of Lester and Eva's cultural performances is contingent upon their race. "Although 'role

playing' may be a contemporary term," remarks the novels forward, "the ideas it encompasses are far from near" (i). This is very well put. Performing cultural identity required the taking on of many roles. For the Knapps, the white working role is the lynchpin for performing normativity.

CHAPTER 2

"WE AIN'T FOREIGN:" CODES OF WHITE PERFORMANCE IN JOHN STEINBECK'S *THE GRAPES OF WRATH*

During the 1930s, the United States faced an economic and cultural destabilization in which those who were comfortably normative, middle class whites, were forced to face poverty, either through their own economic decline or through seeing those around them become destitute. With this change, middle class whiteness became more precarious. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, we see the response to this stripping away of privilege. The Joads, whose whiteness is in flux because of their economic and social roles, perform their whiteness by following deeply ingrained codes of normativity. These codes, from privacy to perpetuating the white race, give the Joads the facade of whiteness and a feeling of security in a vastly changing world.

To fully appreciate the complexity of the Joads' whiteness, we must first understand how this position is threatened by their status as "Okies." As Annalee Newitz and Matt Wray note in their Introduction to *White Trash*, "white trash is a complex cultural category" (4). Marked

both by class and race, the white working poor straddle common definitions of whiteness. Unlike the normative invisibility of the Knapps, the Joads are too poor to be white and too white to be as poor as they are. They transgress whiteness through their work. The job they had as farmers and the jobs they seek in California cause their whiteness to come into question and threaten the whiteness of those around them. By examining how the Joads enforce their racial privilege through clearly defined cultural codes, we see the very structures upon which whiteness is constructed. In other words, the instability of the Joads' whiteness as a result of their work (and sometime their lack there of) calls attention to its construction, thus giving it visibility.

In further complicating definitions of whiteness, the Joads give whiteness more visibility. They call "our attention to the way that discourses of class and racial difference tend to bleed into one another, especially in the way that they pathologize and lay waste to their 'others,'" as Newotz and Wray state in "What is 'White Trash'? Stereotypes and Economic Conditions of Poor Whites in the United States," (169). The whiteness of the Joads, in conjunction with their poverty and lack of autonomy as a

result of their unemployment, destabilizes whiteness for themselves and the normative whites they encounter. It causes those within the normative white community to notice them, both for their similarities to one another and their differences.

Color serves as the most obvious marking of whiteness. As Richard Dyer notes in *White*, "in a visual culture . . . , social groups must be visibly recognisable and representable, since this is a major currency of communication and power. Being visible as white is a passport to privilege" (44). The visibility of whiteness is elemental to its performance. This aspect of whiteness troubling for the Joads. In the descriptions of each member of the Joad family, their whiteness is tinted as off-white in some way; it is often washed out with brown or grey, as if the very dust that coats the land has stained their visible status as privileged. When the first central character, Tom, is introduced in the novel, for example, he is described as having "very dark brown" eyes "with a hint of brown pigment in his eyeballs. His cheek bones were high and wide, and strong deep lines cut down his cheeks, in curves beside his mouth" (9). Tom's mother, Ma Joad, is also introduced as faded in her whiteness:

She wore a loose Mother Hubbard of gray cloth in which there had once been colored flowers, but the color was washed out now, so that the small flowered pattern was only a little lighter gray than the background Her thin steel-gray hair was gathered in a sparse wispy knot at the back of her head (99-100).

While the Joads have white skin, their whiteness has faded and has been stained by years of work.

The variation in skin tone among whites is a highly complex area of inquiry. The fluctuations in white skin tones is, in fact, one way in which we can question whiteness as an all-encompassing category. No one really is white: people considered white have varying skin tones from pale pink to light olive. The emphasis is on the lightness of skin. For the Joads, however, their lightness darkens as a result of their work. As Richard Dyer notes, "colour distinctions within whiteness have been understood in relation to labour. To work outside the home . . . is to be exposed to the elements, especially the sun and the wind, which darken white skin" (*White*, 57). Clearly the Joads are exposed to these elements as farmers and as they become migratory. Their color wears the mark of labor. We can see the distinction between the colors of white normativity and

the colors of working whites by examining the descriptions of the Joads within the context of photographic representations of both groups. These images give us a visual reference for analyzing the intricacies of white construction.

Furthermore, these images articulate the divisions of whiteness underpinning the entire novel but particularly emphasized in chapter fifteen. This chapter is important in the novel because, like the images we will be examining, it gives a referent for the whiteness being articulated by the Joads. This chapter takes place in a road-side coffee shop and presents three categories of whiteness to Steinbeck's readers: upper, middle and lower class whites. Each group enters the coffee shop as customers. The upper class is closely scrutinized and remarked upon:

Languid, heat-raddled ladies, small nucleuses about whom revolve a thousand accouterments: creams, ointments to grease themselves, coloring matter in phials Little pot-bellied men in light suits and panama hats; clean, pink men with puzzled worried eyes, with restless eyes (211).

In Figure 1 we see figures much like those being criticized, in this case the upper class Kennedys, posing

for a family portrait. The people in this photo represent the center, the privileged. In fact, mostly dressed in white, the occupants of this photograph have clearly never worked outside. Their whiteness has been preserved.



Figure 1



Figure 2

The woman in Figure 2 wears the markings of the white middle class, articulated through the character of the coffee shop waitress in chapter fifteen. "Minnie or Susy or Mae, middle-aging behind the counter, hair curled and rouge and powder on a sweating face" (209). As a generic representation of the norm, Mae jokes with the truck drivers who stop in for a cup of coffee and a piece of pie. She is "the backbone of the joint" (209). Like Mae, the woman in Figure 2 is powdered and wears dark lipstick. She has particularly fair skin. She has all the markings of the

feminine beauty standards of the late thirties/early forties. Her pale face, contrasted against her red lipstick and the black background, practically glows. This angelically glowing white woman is an extreme representation, precisely because it is an idealisation. It reached its apogee towards the end of the nineteenth century and especially in . . . situations of heightened perceived threat to the hegemony of whiteness (Dyer, *White*, 127).

Her whiteness, glowing against the back-drop of her middle class identity, perpetuates privilege.

Such categories slip when skin tones darken. The family in Figure 3, for example, reflects the category in which the Joads reside. These farmers have skin that has been darkened by their jobs. After the Joads' first day of driving to California, "their faces were shining with sunburn they could not escape" (169). This shine is quite different from the glow of the woman in Figure 2. As Dyer puts it, the glow versus the shine is an important distinction in performances of whiteness. White women of privilege "glow rather than shine Shine . . . is light bouncing off the surface of the skin. It is the mirror effect of sweat, itself connoting physicality"

(White, 122). Exposure to the sun causes the Joad family to shine and darken, thus highlighting their transgression from white normativity.



Figure 3



Figure 4

Compare the family in Figure 3 to the woman and child in Figure 4. Both subjects are defined as white by their features, but the family in Figure 3 has a troubled whiteness because of their skin tones. The cultural codes of performance once the bulb flashes and the image burns conflict with the family's assertion as white. Their tanned skin "discloses the truth that identities are not singularly true or false but multiple and contingent," as Elaine Ginsberg states in her introduction to *Passing and the Fictions of Identity* (4). By slipping into the category of colored, by making their whiteness visible, and calling

it into question, families like the Joads and the one in Figure 3 destabilize whiteness as invisible normativity.

While the sun they are exposed to through work causes them to alter in color, their job also causes the Joads to get dirty. Cleanliness is a prevalent mark of white privilege. White superiority, according to Dyer, "is conceived and expressed, with its emphasis on purity, cleanliness, virginity, in short, absence, inflects whiteness once again towards non-particularity" (*White*, 70). We can see an articulation of this emphasis on cleanliness when comparing the upper class customers to the poor white customers who stop at the coffee shop in chapter fifteen. Whereas the white woman has "a bag of bottles, syringes, pills, powders, fluids, jellies to make [her] sexual intercourse safe, odorless, and unproductive" (211), the family traveling to California (clearly mirroring the Joads) show wear and tear:

The man was dressed in gray wool trousers and a blue shirt, dark blue with sweat on the back and under the arms. The boys in overalls and nothing else, ragged patched overalls. Their hair was light, and it stood up evenly all over their heads, for it had been roached. Their faces were streaked with dust. They

went directly to the mud puddle under the hose and dug their toes into the mud (216).

While criticized by the narrator, the cleanliness depicted with the upper class woman is an essential element of white performance, as Dyer described earlier. The image in Figure 5, for example, reflect ideal white childhood. The children in Figure 6, however, wear the markings of poverty. Their dirty faces create a boundary between themselves and the normative.



Figure 5



Figure 6

However, the visibility of whiteness is not only a demarcation. It is also a role of privilege. Consequently, the Joads' whiteness is threatened by their lack of land ownership. They are, in fact, displaced and forced to move elsewhere because they do not own land. But the psychological impact of lacking land is as deeply felt as

the materiality. In not owning land, the Joads lack independence. As Frank Tower notes in "Projecting Whiteness: Race and the Unconscious History of 19th-Century American Workers:"

in order to compensate for the alienation and degradation they felt as hirelings in a republic that valued independence and mastery, white workers constructed an identity of whiteness that claimed independence and power for all those who shared the same skin type and projected dependency onto a black other (49).

As such, the Joads must stake out their sense of superiority wherever they can find it. Tom explains this in the very beginning of the novel: "'That there's our line. We didn't really need no fence there, but we had the wire, an' Pa kinda liked her there. Said it give him a feelin' that forty was forty'" (39). Pa Joad marks the land he does not own because it gives him the feeling of ownership. These false borders are much like the ones used to demarcate him as white. While they give him a sense of control, it is a boundary that is quickly and frequently erased throughout the novel.

Their lack of land ownership and thereby their dependence on larger corporations, make the Joads powerless against the treatment they receive from the anonymous corporations that plow them out from their homes:

Now farming became industry, and the owners followed Rome, although they didn't know it. . . And then the dispossessed were drawn west . . . We got no place to live. Like ants scurrying for work, for food, and most of all for land. We ain't foreign. Seven generations back Americans, and beyond that Irish, Scotch, English, German. One of our folks in the Revolution, an' they was lots of our folks in the Civil War-both sides. Americans (317-18).

Rather than possessing the autonomy and political strength of whiteness, the Joads are treated as dispensable annoyances. They are not envisioned as contributing members of white society. "They were men and slaves while the banks were machines and masters all at the same time" (43). No matter how many fences they put up, the machines of the corporations erase them.

This form of identity is quite different from what is normally considered white. Even in critical analyses of whiteness, privilege is assumed. "Whiteness specifies the

cultural construction of . . . a structural position of social privilege and power," John Hartigan tells us in "Establishing the Fact of Whiteness." This position of privilege is an unstable one for the Joads. While they acquire a tolerance unavailable to the "imported slaves, although they did not call them slaves: Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, Filipinos," who "if they get funny-deport them" (316), their whiteness is threatened by their poverty and thereby their lack of autonomy.

The sense of being overpowered by a social structure that excludes them is very powerful for the Joads and so is their position as observed. When they think of ways to stabilize their economic situation, they are blocked at every turn. In describing California to Tom Joad, one character remarks:

"She's a nice country. But she was stole a long time ago You'll pass lan' flat and fine with water thirty feet down, and that lan's layin' fallow. But you can't have none of that lan'. That's a Lan' and Cattle Company You go in there an' plant you a little corn, an' you'll go to jail!" (279).

For the poor families like the Joads, land ownership is outside their grasp as is the vision of economic

opportunity. In this way, the Joads are under the gaze of the oppressor. As David Roediger states in his analysis of Yank in *The Hairy Ape* in "White Looks: Hairy Apes, True Stories, and Limbaugh's Laughs," "looks both frame and capture relations of power. They at once express racism and privilege, valorizing tropes that grow out of and alter how classes within the imperialist powers that see the colonized and one another" ("Looks," 37). The Joads are aware of being looked at by the culture at large. "'People gonna have a look in their eye. They gonna look at you an' their face says, 'I don't like you, you son-of-a-bitch'" You gonna see in people's face how they hate you" (280). The gaze of the white culture disrupts the Joads' ability to participate within it. In these looks, they not only see hatred; they also see their position as other.

The people looking at them are both the corporate hegemony and the cultural norm of the middle class. This slippage in white normativity is further highlighted by the treatment they receive on an individual basis from members of the white middle class. As the narrator comments, "the local people whipped themselves into a mold of cruelty. They formed unions, squads, and armed them-armed with clubs, with gas, with guns. We own the country. We can't

let those Okies get out of hand" (386). The local people, coded here as the middle class, as those whites with jobs, feel a sense of ownership over the land the poor are trying to work on. An us vs. them mentality has been developed. As one character states in the novel, "There ain't room enough for you an' me, for your kind an' my kind, for rich and poor together all in one country, for thieves and honest men. For hunger and fat. Whyn't you go back where you came from?" (163). "'We don't want none of you settlin' here,'" remarks the Sheriff of the first town in California at which they arrive (291). The poor whites who flood California are coded as other. Their failure to perform the white normative "de-stabilize[s] and undermine[s] any unified or essentialized notion of white identity as the primary locus of social privilege and power" (Newitz and Wray, "What Is" 169).

The use of the term "Okies" marks the Joads as other, as well. But what exactly *is* an "Okie"? When the term is first used in the novel, the Joads are confused. We can see this when Tom asks a fellow camp resident what the term means when he first hears is:

"Tom said, 'Okie? What's that?'"

"'Well, Okie use' ta mean you was from Oklahoma. Now it means you're a dirty son-of-a-bitch. Okie means you're scum. Don't mean nothing itself, it's the way they say it'" (280).

"Okie" lacks meaning yet has a clear referent and even more clear implications. The use of slang to describe the poor whites entering California is particularly important. As Newitz and Wray note, slang is the only way poor whites can be marked within a culture based on white privilege.

"Indeed, 'subordinate white' is such an oxymoron in the dominant culture that this social position is principally spoken about in our slang terms like *white trash*, *redneck*, *cracker*, and *hillbilly*" ("What is," 169). The slang term "Okies" erases any reference to race or class and replaces it with regional referent. This sense of place as the causation of their failure to participate effectively within the center eases any concerns about the center's instability.

Troubled as their whiteness is, the Joads still articulate rather strict codes which reflect the normative from which they are estranged. These codes are in response to their whiteness being questioned. As a normative position, the definition of whiteness, or what Mike Hill

terms "the 'classification' of whiteness" in "Can Whiteness Speak?" (156), is at its core an act of making the visible seen. As Hill notes, "the markings of whiteness with an irrevocable difference and the response of whiteness to that process of marking" is where the study of whiteness is most complex ("Speak" 156). The concept of difference is like a dark spot in the pool of whiteness. It makes whiteness visible and calls into question the very concepts upon which whiteness is based.

The Joads' response to the process of marking them as on the periphery of whiteness is to renegotiate their performances through deeply entrenched codes. These codes echos what Valerie Babb describes in *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture* as the corner-stone of white construction:

the ideology of whiteness [weaves] together arbitrary traits of hair color, eye color, skin color, religious belief, language, morality, and class into a network of standards against which those it defines as different could be measured (169).

The Joads perform these traits whenever possible in order to be seen as the same rather than different. As the narrator of the novel notes:

the families learned what rights must be observed—the right of privacy in the tent; the right to keep the past black hidden in the heart; the right to talk and to listen; the right to refuse help or accept, to offer help or decline it; the right of son to court and daughter to be courted; the right of the hungry to be fed; the rights of the pregnant and the sick to transcend all other rights (265).

While these "rights" are assumed to be basic human rights, for the Joads they are ingredients for maintaining white performance. These codes are revealed in the form of gender roles, biological perpetuation, and privacy, all enforced and protected through violence.

The most frequently enforced code in the Joads' performance is that of patriarchal gender roles. In fact, the importance of these gender roles is established as the novel begins. When describing how the families react to being told to leave the land they had lived on for generations, Steinbeck depicts the men and women as participating in clearly defined ways. The men squat and think while the women look on to read their men's faces. "Then they asked, What'll we do? And the men replied, I don't know. But it was all right. The women knew it was all

right, and the watching children knew it was all right. Women and children knew deep in themselves that no misfortune is too great to bear if their men were whole" (7). Women and children, grouped here as if in one category, are dependent upon men. All responsibility for the family's well-being lies with the men.

Before leaving for California, the Joad family also has a strict patriarchal hierarchy. This family order, called "the congress, the family government," falls along very strict patrilineal lines. Grandpa serves as "titular head," with Pa as the functioning man in charge. All decisions run through him. When Grandpa dies, Pa takes on the role of head of the family, thereby taking ownership for all decisions the family makes. Once they enter California and lose the safety of their rural working class community and control over their own destinies, the family dynamics falter. The gender roles become troubled as their status as white begins to be questioned and Ma becomes more and more assertive. "'Pa's lost his place. He ain't the head no more. We're crackin' up, Tom. There ain't no fambly now" (536). This slippage from the patriarchal norm makes the family uneasy and makes them feel as if their cultural foundations are cracking. As they struggle with these

codes, the Joads try to reassert their whiteness. "Pa sniffled. 'Seems like times is changes,' he said sarcastically. 'Time was when a man said what we'd do. Seems like women is tellin' now. Seems like it's purty near time to get out a stick'" (481). Pa recognizes the slippage of this social role and reasserts his power.

Within the structured family dynamics, definitions of masculinity are heavily enforced. As discussed in the previous chapter and as described here by Michael Uebel, definitions of masculinity "[depend] upon its inscription within a systematic performance" (5). Within the position as other, the men in the Joad family embrace stereotyped, even caricatured, elements of masculinity by violently rejecting any behavior marked as feminine. Crying, for example, is treated as a fault. When returning home after four years in prison, Tom sees his mother and fights back the tears: "Tom pulled his underlip between his teeth and bit it. Her eyes went wonderingly to his bitten lip, and she saw the little line of blood against his teeth and the trickle of blood down his lip" (101). In another scene, Tom states, "'My pa used to say, 'Anybody can break down. It takes a man not to'" (193). The fear of tears, of weakness, is a metaphorical fear of emasculation. As their whiteness

slips, the men in the Joad family, especially Tom, become more concerned with maintaining stereotypical definitions of manliness. When Tom wants to fight against the Sheriff who assaults them in the first camp they stay at in California, Tom tells his mother, "'You don' want me to crawl like a beat bitch, with my belly on the groun', do you?'" (381). This image of a "beat bitch" demonstrates Tom's fear of becoming feminized. Now that their whiteness has been called into question, the men in the Joad family are repulsed by anything marked as feminine.

Not only are they separated from the feminine, the men in the Joad family understand the feminine as dependent upon their own performances of masculinity. This need to perceive women as dependent lies not only in their material reality; it also gives them the sense of order they need to perform their whiteness. Such reliance on patriarchal norms was common for the white working poor in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century America, according to Lott in *Love and Theft*: "Finding it difficult to shore up their power in the straitened and unreliable circumstance of wage earning, men clung to at least the ideology of female dependency" (196). This vision of women as dependent and needing discipline in order to maintain them helps Pa and

the other men of the Joad family maintain their feeling of normalcy by attaining the role of privileged.

Another privileged position within these codes of performance is that of the sexually charged male. Being a "Tom cat" or feeling "randy" are common roles for men throughout the novel. The men often share their sexual escapades and desires with one another. The Preacher, for example, describes his struggles with Christianity and sexual desire to Tom:

"'I was doin' a consid'able tom-cattin' aroun'
Why, Tommy, I'm a-lustin' after the flesh.'"

"'Me too,' said Tom. 'Say, the day I come outa
McAlester I was smokin'. I run me down a girl, a hoor
girl, like she was a rabbit. I won't tel ya what

happened. I wouldn't tell nobody what happened'" (233).

Their sexual desires are discussed with almost a sense of pride. In this way, Tom, Al, and the Preacher are utilizing a form of privilege available to them as white men. Their sexual desire, in Valerie Babb's words, "illustrates the sexual licence patriarchy grants white men by sanctioning white male sexuality" (76). In performing this privileged position by discussing their sexual conquests, the men in the Joad family are able to perform within the role of

white masculinity. In fact, were they to reject sexuality, their masculinity would become even further problematized. "Not to be sexually driven," comments Dyer, "is liable to cast a question mark over a man's masculinity—the darkness is a sign of his true masculinity, just as his ability to control it is a sign of his whiteness" (*White*, 28).

Without these sexual desires, the Joad men would become feminized.

Just as male gender roles are clearly defined, so too are the roles of women. While the men are actors, working to support and protect the family, the women serve a supportive role. The narrator describes the women of the families similar to the Joads in such a way: "The women watched the men, watched to see whether the break has come at last. The women stood silently and watched" (592). As quoted by Dyer, Kate Davy in "Outing Whiteness":

argues that the archetypal role of white women has been to foster individualism in white men while denying it to themselves, "reproducing a construction of white womanhood that allows white women to signify and enact . . . whiteness . . . without inhabiting the subject position reserved for the white men" (*White*, 30).

For the women in the Joad family, their job is to watch the men, not in a judgmental fashion but in looking for ways to give aid. The women feed the men and perpetuate their livelihood.

In this way, the women cling to the same sense of order the men in the Joad family embrace. They see themselves as dependent and accept this role wholeheartedly. When planning their journey to California, Ma "looked to Tom to speak, because he was a man, but Tom did not speak. She let him have the chance that was his right . . ." (127). Ma recognizes that Tom, her son, has a privileged right to speak before she does. Maintaining these gender roles gives the women and the men of the Joad family a sense of order in a chaotic environment. Without this hierarchy, they would be unable to mirror the patriarchal norms of the white middle class. Consequently, the women in the Joad family also gain a sense of privilege by performing these white middle class roles of dependency.

But, as discussed earlier, the divisions between male and female roles falter periodically in the novel. As the Joads' whiteness fades, the divisions between men and women vacillate. We can see this when Preacher tries to help Ma cut up a pig in preparation for their trip:

"'It's women's work,' [Ma] said finally.

'It's all work,' the preacher replied. "They's too much of it to split up to men's or women's work" (146).

In addition to further highlighting the racial divisions, this ability to shed gender norms reinforces their white privilege. Moving in and out of such clearly defined roles is a form of privilege available to whites. As with the Knapps, who were better able to perform their whiteness through gender switching, the Joads can bend gender roles when appropriate. However, unlike the Knapps, this flexibility is short lived. As Kate Davy notes, white women "never quite [reach] the most privileged end of [the] continuum/world order; [they] can never, paradoxically, fully embody the unembodied dimension of white masculinity . . ." (213). In other words, white masculinity, at the center of all cultural constructions, has a mythic, unembodied position women can never attain, despite their status as privileged.

Another source of privilege for the Joad women is their function of perpetuating the white race. Like the land, the women are perceived to be filled with "sleeping life waiting to be spread and dispersed, every seed armed

with an appliance of dispersal" (20). This role is performed and centered within the character of the pregnant Rose of Sharon. As she is introduced, the narrator describes her as follows: "Rose of Sharon was pregnant and careful. Her hair, braided and wrapped around her head, made an ash-blond crown. Her soft round face . . . had already put on the barrier of pregnancy, the self-sufficient smile, the knowing perfection-look" (129). Again we see the vision of angelic beauty in the form of her blond crown/halo, an obvious reference to the virgin Mary. This biblical reference helps cleanse the sex inherent in Rose of Sharon's pregnancy. Such a position is very complicated in the paradigm of white womanhood. "White women thus carry . . . the hopes, achievements and character of the race. They guarantee its reproduction, even while succeeding to its highest heights. Yet their very whiteness, their refinement, makes sexuality a disturbance of their racial purity" (Dyer, *White*, 29).

Rose of Sharon is depicted as possessing a strange and mysterious power in her pregnancy. "She was all secrets now she was pregnant, secrets and little silences that seemed to have meanings. She was pleased with herself . . . The world had drawn close around them, and they were in the

center of it, or rather Rose of Sharon was in the center of it with Connie making a small orbit about her" (175-76). Such mystery gives Rose of Sharon a certain amount of power. This power is in her responsibility for helping her race procreate. As Dyer points out, "white discourse has often emphasised the importance of white reproduction and especially white women's responsibility in its regard" (*White*, 27). This understanding of white womanhood is articulated throughout the novel, but particularly in the following comment from Ma when she explains womanhood to Rose of Sharon:

'Woman, it's like all one flow, like a stream, little eddies, little waterfalls, but the river, it goes right on. Woman looks at it like that. We ain't gonna die out . . . Ever'thin we do-seems to me is aimed at goin' on. Seems that way to me. Even gettin' hungry-even bein' sick; some die, but the rest is tougher' (577-78)

White womanhood, no matter how much its race is questioned, is seen as a privileged position in which the future of the white race is at stake. By looking past the ebb and flow of definitions of whiteness, the women of the Joad family can participate in the normative by reproducing it.

Such responsibility is not taken lightly. Like her male counterparts who fear losing their masculinity, Rose of Sharon is constantly concerned about the possibility of failing at her cultural responsibility. We see this as Rose of Sharon rides on the truck, trying to use her body as a protective shield to the whiteness inside of her. "She tried to arch her whole body as a rigid container to preserve her fetus from shock" (223). As she protects her fetus, Rose of Sharon protects the essence of her cultural reproduction. In preserving her unborn child Rose of Sharon preserves her femininity and her whiteness.

Furthermore, any slippage in performing normative gender roles may ultimately cause her ability to participate in white racial reproduction to fail. As one woman in the camp warns Rose of Sharon, pregnancy is a serious responsibility:

"I seen it. Girl a-carryin' a little one, jes; like you. An' she play-acted, an' she hug-danced. And'-the voice great bleak and ominous-'she thinned out and she skinnied out, an'-she dropped the baby dead . . . Dead and bloody. 'Course nobody wouldn' speak to her no more. She had a go away" (423).

The woman in the story failed to perform the white standards of sexual purity and thereby had the privilege of continuing the white race taken away from her. If Rose of Sharon were to lose her white normative femininity by becoming more sexual, Rose of Sharon would be unable to keep the fetus safe. In losing her fetus, Rose of Sharon would lose both her whiteness and her femininity and would be forced to leave the small community of whites in the camp, much like the woman in the story.

In fact, Rose of Sharon is unable to protect her fetus properly. Despite her attention to protecting her fetus, Rose of Sharon's child is stillborn. She has somewhere failed to sufficiently perform her cultural role. No matter how careful and concerned she is about the welfare of her fetus, Rose of Sharon fails to protect her baby. Its shriveled body almost seems to bear the brunt of the Joads' failure to perform white normativity. She is faced with this fact when she first sees her child: "She picked up a lantern and held it over an apple box in the corner. On a newspaper lay a blue shriveled little mummy" (603). This failure to protect her unborn child represents a failure similar to that the men in the Joad family experience. The mummy she gives birth to is an artifact of the Joads'

whiteness. Furthermore, because it is blue, it is even a greater emblem of the Joads' destabilized whiteness. With the breakdown of their white performance, Rose of Sharon is unable to sufficiently carry out the role of reproduction assigned to her by her pregnancy.

However, the last scene in the novel serves to reinforce this slipping gender role performance by reasserting Rose of Sharon's role as giver of life. In this scene, Rose of Sharon is asked to literally nurse a starving man back to health by giving him her milk: "Rose of Sharon loosened one side of the blanket and bared her breast. 'You got to,' she said. She squirmed closer and pulled his head close. 'There!' she said. 'There.' Her hand moved behind his head and supported it. Her fingers moved gently in his hair. She looked up and across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously" (618). The mother and child imagery brings Rose of Sharon's role back. While her child may be dead, her ability to give life is not. Rose of Sharon has succeeded in perpetuating whiteness by saving this man's life.

The Joads maintain an equally slippery grasp on the codes of the middle class work ethic. As they travel from job to job, their connection to the essentials of class

mobility become more and more troubled. As their lack of ownership takes hold and their autonomy decreases, they become dependent upon the protestant work ethic to reclaim their fading whiteness. "'We ain't no bums,' Tom insisted. 'We're lookin' for work. We'll take any kind of work.'" (333). Men should, according to this statement, desire work or else become a bum and fall outside the codes of normative performance. Work will feed the family and will reestablish their whiteness.

As they enter camp in California, they discuss their visions of participating in the normative. They believe that if they work hard enough, they will be able to pull themselves out of the murky cultural position they currently hold. Pa, for example, asks two men who complain about the working conditions in California, "'if a fella's willin' to work hard, can't he cut her?'" (282). He doesn't understand that the work does not exist for him to have. The Joads keep up this vision of hard work as a means to reclaiming whiteness when they arrive in California:

"'Soon's we can, I want a little house.'

Pa said, 'Al-after we've et, you an' me an' Uncle John'll take the truck an' go out lookin' for work'" (417).

Pa's response to Ma's request to own a home, to participate in the middle class, is to look for work. Their hopes for class mobility are dependent upon finding work. Their vision of the "white house" (278) serves as a monument to their dreams of becoming part of the white middle class, a vision that is dependent upon their willingness to participate in the protestant work ethic.

Furthermore, the Joads must work because not to would further distance them from middle class normativity. "'Man wants to work, O.K. If he don't-the hell with him,'" Tom tells a fellow tenant at one of the camps (260). If the men in the Joad family don't work, they become even more a part of the underclass. At the camp, for example, one woman describes her family's experience with going to the Salvation Army for help:

We was hungry-they made us crawl for our dinner. They took our dignity . . . We don't allow nobody in this camp . . . to give nothing to another person. They can give it to the camp, an' the camp can pass it out. We won't have no charity!' Her voice was fierce and hoarse. 'I hate 'em,' she said. 'I ain't never seen my man beat before, but them-them Salvation Army done it to 'im' (432).

Taking charity, here in the form of going to the Salvation Army for food, will take dignity from the families that need it. Since their dignity stems from their sense of belonging to the privileged class of whites, families like the Joads find work that pays too little rather than exchanging the facade of privilege for food.

This middle class norm is not the only form of autonomy performed through the Joads' codes of conduct. They also believe in a strict sense of individualism. This reveals itself in the frequent calling for people to "mind their own business." The truck driver, for example, comments as the novel begins, "But it ain't none of my business. I mind my own yard. It ain't nothing to me" (17). This position of the personal as private represents a feeling of owning of the self and one's destiny. If their affairs are their own, they are no longer victims of any outside forces.

This code of privacy also means that you do not look into the business of others. This is very important for the Joads and families like them. "'What happens to other folks is their own look-out'" (75) is a common statement among the Joads and the other families they encounter. Curiosity

in the affairs of others is treated with suspicion, as we can see when the Joads enter the first camp in California:

"'Guess I'll jes' look aroun' this here camp,' Al said.

'Lookin' for girls, huh?'

'Mindin' my own business,' Al said acidly" (515).

Not looking into the business of others is very important to the Joads. In avoiding the people around them, the Joads will not see the failing white performances of the white families in the camps and on the road. Thus they can keep up their sense of normativity. By keeping themselves from seeing the cultural failings of their peers, they are less able to see the cultural failures of themselves.

Furthermore, the Joads find it necessary to protect their own privacy in order to keep their cultural slippages hidden. When the camp director comes to visit Ma, for example, Pa reacts with hostility:

"What'd he want?" Pa demanded again.

"Didn' want nothin'. Come to see how we was gettin' on," [Ma responds].

"I don' believe it," Pa said. "He's probably a-smootin' an' a-smellin' aroun'" (418).

Pa's concern about snooping reveals his concern about being viewed as other. Such a fear is reinforced by comments made by the middle class about the Joads and families like them. The guards in the last camp they move to, for example, comment upon the particularities of the Joads' life and do so with contempt for their efforts to perform white normativity:

"S'matter, Mack?"

"Why, them goddam Okies. 'Is they warm water?' he says."

The second guard rested his butt on the ground. "It's them gov'ment camps," he said. "I bet that fella been in a gov'ment camp. We ain't gonna have no peace till we wipe them camps out. They'll be wantin' clean sheets, first thing we know" (515-16).

People such as these guards do not respect the Joads' privacy. Normative whites not only recognize the Joads' failure to perform normative whiteness but criticize their attempts to do so.

Views such as these violate the Joads' sense of normalcy. As Ma states, "We're Joads. We don't look up to nobody. Grampa's grampa, he fit in the Revolution. We was farm people till the debt. And then-them people. They done

somepin to us" (420). Consequently, they embrace the opportunity to stay at the government camp among other families balancing the same performances. The Joads feel at home among people like them, for with them, they can keep up the facade of whiteness. "'Praise God, we come home to our own people,'" remarks Ma when the family moves into the government camp and is surrounded with other families who are poor and searching for farm labor. In fact, this camp is structured in much the same way as the family was back in Oklahoma. The two committees, the Central Committee and the Ladies' Committee, are responsible for maintaining order in the camp. The men's group, the central committee, is the foundation upon which the camp's order rests. These men make governing decisions about the camp, just as the men in the Joad family do. The Ladies Committee monitors hygiene and physical well-being, just as the women in the Joad family do. These committees articulate the gendered codes of conduct upon which the Joads' identity is constructed. Consequently, these committees reaffirm their sense of order and their feeling of normalcy.

The fear of being viewed as other causes the Joads to violently protect and enforce their codes of conduct. When labeled as other, for example, their response is to destroy

this positioning with acts of violence. “‘That kid says we was Okies . . . Says we goddamn Okies. I socked him’” (490). If they can silence such articulations of otherness, which strip them of the whiteness and gender roles in which they find comfort and reverts them to regional products, the Joads can keep their sense of normativity. As with the privacy they try to maintain, violence is a reaction to threats on their identity.

Their sense of identity depends on the codes of conduct they have constructed. As Lott points out about the working class, “workingmen many times sought to redress the erosion of their authority with abusiveness and violence” (Love 159). In protecting these codes and lashing out at any questions about their normativity, the Joads enforce a sense of order to the chaotic world in which they live. When Ma’s independence threatens Pa’s patriarchal role, for example, “Pa complained, ‘Seems like the man ain’t go no say no more. She jus’ a heller. Come time we get settled down, I’m a-gonna smack her” (546). To bring in the reins on the out of control gender roles he sees, Pa becomes violent.

Separate, these codes seem like simple ways to function in a hostile environment. Together, they help to

keep the markings of the white middle class on the Joads. As they enter California, they are faced with anarchy: "There was no order in the camp; little gray tents, shacks, cars were scattered about at random" (328). "They had no argument, no system, nothing but their numbers and their hunger" (386). All sense of order has evaded them and so have the divisions between themselves and non-whites:

They was a time when we was on the lan'. They was a boundary to us then. Ol' folks died off, an' little fellas come, an' we was always one thing-we was the fambly-kinda whole and clear. An' now we ain't clear no more. I can't get straight. They ain't nothin' keeps us clear (536).

With the codes they follow, however, the Joads are able to perpetuate their sense of supremacy and their feelings of belonging to the normative center.

The complexity of analyzing the racial challenges of poor whites is best demonstrated by the following comment of a California sheriff about the Joads and families like them: "'Got to keep 'em in line or Christ only knows what they'll do! Why, Jesus, they're as dangerous as niggers in the South!'" (322). Wearing their otherness through their work, poor whites like the Joads ("Okies," in other words)

blur racial boundaries for themselves and for the status quo. This is what makes them such an important part of white analysis: they problematize the normative by transgressing whiteness. As Hartigan notes:

stressing emphatic links between whiteness and dominance has generated analyses that powerfully delineate the vast, diffuse scope of white privilege while unproblematically presenting white people as a collective order with a common culture. The difficult question is whether white racialness can additionally be analyzed as contingent and articulated in registers that exceed the strict operation of domination (498).

My answer to Hartigan is "yes." As dominated and oppressed, the Joads are in fact best able to call into question assumptions of whiteness as normal and static. In being poor, dirty, and tan, the Joads confuse the boundaries of whiteness. In their attempts to reinforce their whiteness, the codes they use give us a closer reading of what it means to perform whiteness. While the walls they build around them may be as thin as those of their canvas tent, the shadows drawn upon the walls give insight into their very construction.

CHAPTER 3

NOT YET AMERICAN: WHITE PERFORMANCE AND EUROPEAN IMMIGRANTS

IN ANZIA YEZIERSKA'S *THE BREAD GIVERS*

AND UPTON SINCLAIR'S *THE JUNGLE*

So these are the real Americans, I thought, thrilled by the lean, straight bearing of the passers-by. They had none of the terrible fight for bread and rent that I always saw in New York people's eyes. Their faces were not worn with the hunger for things they never could have in their lives. There was in them that sure, settled look of those who belong to the world in which they were born (210-11).

Sara Smolinsky. *The Bread Givers*.

In the above quote, we see Sara Smolinsky, a poor immigrant girl, respond to her first encounter with "real Americans." Her reflection upon this event begs the question: who are the "real Americans" and what makes them "real?" Ultimately, it poses the question: are "real Americans" code for white Americans and what differentiates them from white immigrants? We can begin to define this group by looking at its use in Karen Brodtkin's *How Jews Became White Folks and What that Says About Race in America*, in which she states that early twentieth-century America "saw a steady stream of warnings by scientists, policymakers, and the popular press that the

'mongrelization' of the Nordic or Anglo-Saxon race—the *real Americans*—by inferior European races . . . was destroying the fabric of the nation" (emphasis added, 25). For Brodtkin, then, as well as for Sara, the "real Americans" are those inside the white norm.

However, as a culture originally formed by white English immigrants, for American culture to mark European immigrants as other, as not real, is a notable construction for American perceptions because, like the Joads discussed in the previous chapter, European immigrants have the physical elements of whiteness, with the skin, eye, and hair colors to be marked as such. Fearing their influx into the gene pool, as Brodtkin's quote describes, created an odd division between the socially and the physically white. Such a dependence on division reflects the instability of whiteness, as Matthew Jacobson points out in *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*: "As races are invented categories - designations coined for the sake of grouping and separating peoples along lines of presumed difference - Caucasians are made and not born"(4).

In the previous two chapters, we saw how characters both physically and socially defined as white struggle with the cultural definition of whiteness by reasserting how whiteness is performed. In this chapter, we will see how

whiteness is grappled with by those who are physically coded as white but are defined as other because of their place as immigrant. In the novels under discussion here, Anzia Yezierska's *The Bread Givers* and Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, we see how two immigrants struggle with their desire to fulfill their sense of whiteness by trying to attain the American dream, a dream which they attempt to achieve through work. Because of this integral tie between work performance and whiteness, the realization of "real" whiteness happens within their work. That is, through their work, Jurgis in *The Jungle* and Sara in *The Bread Givers* are better able to understand their status within white culture and their process of enlightenment further reveals the fragile balance of performance inherent in white identity.

In order to examine the place of characters such as Sara and Jurgis in white America, we must first understand how their identity is constructed outside of that norm. Although they are visibly "white," Sara and Jurgis are clearly treated as and conceived as other. We must recognize this treatment for what it gives us critically: a reflection of the fluidity of whiteness. As Jacobson notes, "to miss the fluidity of race itself in this process of becoming Caucasian is to reify a monolithic whiteness, and, further, to cordon that whiteness off from other racial groupings along lines that are silently presumed to be more

genuine" (6-7). Consequently, we need to look closely at how this division in white performance is not only accomplished, but how those who are physically white and yet outside of the color line of whiteness both attempt to perform the cultural identity of whiteness and how they come to understand this very performance.

By straddling these definitions of whiteness, Sara and Jurgis provide a new insight to the performative structures of whiteness because they both observe white performance as outsiders and have the potential (at least in their minds) to cross the line and attain whiteness. These characters and their stories serve as useful tools for further understanding the extent to which whiteness is constructed and performed. As Valerie Babb points out in *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture*:

the written recollections of those who were *not yet American* reveal the constructed nature of whiteness through recounting life stories of white-skinned peoples who had to learn the privileging of whiteness and its synonymity with American identity (emphasis added, 119).

The same can be said for Sara and Jurgis. Their development in these novels stems upon their understanding of the diverse performances of whiteness. In coming to terms with

whiteness, an otherwise invisible and normative position, these characters gain awareness about their own positions in American culture. As Babb notes, the "immigrant narrative may be used to discover the ways in which seemingly nonracial institutions and rituals were in actuality part of a multifaceted cultural matrix that was diagramming and urging conformity to the white ideal" (119). Sara and Jurgis provide us with the narratives that shed light upon this ideal.

This ideal is funneled through Sara and Jurgis' focus on the American dream, a dream that is contingent upon the assumption of whiteness. Although they are marked as outside the white norm, Jurgis and Sara perceive work as the vehicle for attaining white normalcy. While race is not mentioned, they "implicitly racialize the national identity to which their subjects aspire" (Babb 121). The American dream, for these characters, is the old adage that hard work will bring monetary and social rewards. In their novels, Yezierska and Sinclair promote a strong belief in America and the work ethic inherent in the American dream.ⁱ

According to Brodtkin, "by 1910, 58 percent of the industrial workforce in twenty of the main mining and manufacturing industries were European immigrants" (56). As a result of their strong presence in the workforce and their recent movement to the United States, the belief in

the American dream was a distinguishing feature in immigrant narratives, much as it holds a lot of importance for Sara and Jurgis. As Babb describes it, immigrant fiction "generally defined being made into Americans broadly, as gaining the freedom to fulfill personal potential through acquiring education, economic security, and partaking in the democratic processes" (121). These characters see this dream as not only a vehicle for economic freedom but as a way to become American, and thereby white. Sara, for example, keeps her thoughts of belonging to the white norm, of being a "Real American," with her as she struggles to put herself through school: "wherever I went, in the street, in the subway, by day and by night, I had always before my eyes a vision of myself in college, mingling every day with the inspired minds of great professors and educated higher-ups" (184). Jurgis, too, is driven to work harder toward attaining success. When his wife faints from the exhaustion of her job, Jurgis tells her "leave it to me; leave it to me. I will earn more money—I will work harder" (26). Jurgis believes he can work hard enough for her to stay home, for them to make the American dream a reality. Through work, be it in a the stock yards or the school yard, these characters believe they can attain whiteness through the American dream.

The Bread Givers

The Bread Givers is a novel ultimately focused on the American dream. It centers on the narrator, Sara Smolinsky, and her ability to attain economic success despite the hardships caused by the cultural clash between her and her strict Jewish father and by her place outside white normativity. Throughout the novel, the Smolinsky family struggles against poverty, a situation which is often blamed on the father's unwillingness to leave his "old world"/non white ways in order to work. Once Sara sets out on her own, we see her fight for survival in a culture that has marked her as other, both in her work at the beginning of the novel and in college later on. The novel ends with Sara working as a successful English teacher in love with her principal, who agrees to help her care for her ailing father. Her sisters have been married off, her mother has died, and her father is a beggar, but although she worked hard to shed her Jewish identity, through it all she manages to return to her roots by embracing and caring for her father.

The central issue for this evolution in Sara's character, and for the novel as a whole, is work. As *The Bread Givers* opens, we can see how fundamental work is to the novel: "One look at [Bessie], and I knew she had not yet found work The whole family were hanging on

Bessie's neck for her wages" (1). The search for and maintenance of positions in the labor force underlie the novel as a whole. Work is a fundamental issue in Jewish-American identity, according to Brodtkin: "Work, especially the performance of work that was once important to the economy of the nation and that was defined as menial and unskilled, was key" (55). The Jewish community identified itself, in part, by being able to work. Work equates food and comfort. Without it, the Smolinsky family suffers profoundly: "'I'll do anything, work the nails off my fingers, only to be free from the worry for rent'" (13). The absence of work and the poverty it causes constantly hangs over the heads of the characters, causing them worry and unhappiness.

This is more than suffering from poverty; the Smolinsky family also suffers from the shame of being poor in a country that is plentiful for others and which they thought would be plentiful for themselves. They moved to America in order to survive. "'And when everything was gone from us, then our only hope was to come to America, where Father thought things cost nothing at all'" (34). With this hope, they try to work in order to take part in the normative culture. Their failure to find work that will provide economic success marks them as other, as is

demonstrated when Sara first begins her stint as a herring seller:

I cried out my herring with all the burning fire of my ten old years. So loud was my yelling, for my little size, that people stopped to look at me. And more came to see what the others were looking at. "Give only a look on the saleslady," laughed a big fat woman with a full basket "How old are you, little skinny bones? Ain't your father working?" (21).

Sara must harden her heart to these taunts, the pronunciations of her otherness, but she carries these definitions of normalcy with her throughout the novel.

These jobs consume not only their self-identity but their physicality as well. Sara's sister, Bessie, for example, becomes transformed when she takes a job selling fish. "Her thin arms were covered with the gummy scales of the fish. Her face, her hair, and her apron were thick with it" (140). In selling the fish, her body begins to take on the qualities of her merchandise. Once this occurs, she is further distanced from a white performance. The physical elements of whiteness in her skin have now been replaced with the otherness of fish scales.

Sara's work has also caused her body to appear unnatural when she takes physical education in college. When she first meets her physical education teacher, she is

quickly evaluated as outside the norm of the white female body: "'You properly exercised?' She looked at me from head to foot. 'Your posture is bad. Your shoulders sag. You need additional corrective exercises outside the class'" (216). Her body has been deformed from the work she has done and must be corrected through exercise to become more normative. Clearly, with her posture so poor, Sara is marked as outside of the white norm.

Despite these problems, Sara and many other characters in the novel think the right work will enable them to become white, to attain the American dream. As a suitor for Bessie describes it, "'I want a wife for a purpose. I must open myself a shop [where] . . . we could work ourselves up'" (47). Sara's father, despite his maintenance of Jewish cultural norms, also embraces the ideals of the American dream: "'In America, a man can get rich quick if he only has a head for business'" (111). Wealth and upward mobility are attainable goals for these characters, if only they can learn to play the game correctly, to perform the right working act.

This belief in the American dream in the face of its obvious failures for her in the past is what spurs Sara on. We can see this when she sits in a restaurant for the white working class and contemplates her decision to leave her family to work on her own. When she entered the restaurant,

she was tired, hungry, and ready to return home, "but the white curtains and the clean, restful place lifted me with longing for the higher life. Great dreams spurred my feet on my way to night school" (161). This dream of "the higher life" is based on the falsehood of the American success story, a story disproved over and over again by the experiences of nearly everyone Sara encounters. While others follow their dreams and fail, while her father buys a grocery business that is ultimately a sham, Sara clings to this ideal. She bases her goals not on what she has encountered in her life but on a fictitious story she has read in the paper:

And then it flashed to me. The story from the Sunday paper. A girl-slaving away in the shop. Her hair was already turning gray, and nothing had ever happened to her. The suddenly she began to study in the night school, then college. And worked and studies, on and on, till she became a teacher in the schools (155).

This story, false as it is, reinforces the American dream for Sara. Although she has seen it fail again and again, as we shall discuss below, Sara takes this tale as truth. It is only once she experiences failure herself that she recognizes its flaws.

Sara encounters many flawed performances throughout the novel, and these performances of success are based upon

different interpretations of what it means to be white. For some, whiteness is something externally attainable, something that can be attached to the body and removed when no longer required. Zalmon the fish peddler, for example, tries to show himself as successful by renting a tuxedo and shaving his long black beard: "No one could believe how this old fish peddler could make himself such a dressed-up American man" (100). These attachments merely add sparkle to non-white performances and are ultimately transient. Zalmon's tuxedo is rented, and he soon returns to his nonwhite identity after he has married Sara's sister, Bessie. Zalmon put on a white performance for the Smolinsky family in order to convince them that he was a successful bachelor. These markings of success are never permanent. Rather, they merely replicate white normativity by applying the superficial accessories of economic success.

Another class of performance Sara encounters, and embraces to some extent, is that of the *Americanerin*. These are the Jewish immigrants who embrace the social order of whiteness. Mashah, Sara's sister, sees the superficial markings of whiteness as her way to gain a normative performance, but she also believes in the system at large rather than trying to fool it with glittering accouterments:

She was no more one of us than the painted lady looking down from the calendar on the wall . . . Her clothes were always so new and fresh, without the least little wrinkle, like the dressed-up doll lady from the show window of the grandest department store (4).

Mashah dresses her white body with the accessories of the normative, a showroom mannequin, in hopes to attain the whiteness that evades her as a result of her ethnicity.

Mashah also emulates whiteness by maintaining cleanliness. As discussed in the previous chapter, cleanliness is conceived of as a form of whiteness. This is in stark contrast to the dirt of poverty, as is demonstrated in the following description of a Jewish tenement in an 1893 *New York Times* article:

This neighborhood, peopled almost entirely by people who claim to have been driven from Poland and Russia, is the eyesore of New York and the filthiest place on the western continent. It is impossible for a Christian to live here because he will be driven out, either by blows or the dirt and stench. Cleanliness is an unknown quality to these people. They cannot be lifted up to a higher plane because they do not want to be (quoted in Brodtkin, 29).

Contrary to the beliefs the above author expresses, Sara's family (and her sister Mashah in particular) does want to "be lifted up." As a result of this desire, Mashah becomes an expert at cleanliness:

She told us that by those Americans, everybody in the family had a toothbrush and separate towel for himself . . . When the day for wages came, Mashah quietly went to the Five and Ten Cent Store and bought, not only a toothbrush and a separate towel for herself, but even a separate piece of soap (6).

Mashah's desire to be clean is part of her desire to perform whiteness. Perhaps to Mashah, in removing the grime of poverty, she can remove the "stain" of her ethnicity.

Not only does Mashah try to look the part of the white norm, she also reveals her belief in this reality by spreading tales of what it means to be white: "Mashah came home with stories that in rich people's homes that had silver knives and forks" (6). Mashah studies the ways of the white people she works for, "those Americans," and emulates both their appearance and their habits, but just as with Zalmon, this normative position fades. Once married, Mashah loses her beauty and her ability to maintain the facade of whiteness she once had. When Sara goes to see her sister after she has been married a while, she sees that married life has taken away her belief in the

attainability of whiteness. Her husband tells her, "'You work, work, till you can't move. You don't know when to stop till you drop'" (150). Mashah can no longer admonish working because of her family life. She takes care of her children and loses her faith in feminine leisure and aesthetics.

Like Mashah and Zalmon, Sara's dreams of American success are based on the fictions of whiteness, of "real Americans". Once she goes away to college, Sara sees these people for herself: "So these are the real Americans What light-hearted laughing youth met my eyes! All the young people I had ever seen were shut up in factories. But here were the young girls and young men enjoying life, free from the worry for a living" (210-11). Unlike her and her family, unlike the rented tuxedos of Jewish success, unlike the Americanerin who merely replicate American whiteness, the white Americans she sees in the small upstate New York college town have "that sure, settled look of those who belong to the world in which they are born" (211). With their "pink, clean skins" and their "spic-and-span cleanliness," the real Americans she had idealized for so long teach her as much as her professors do (212). Sara's studies become as much an education of arithmetic and literature as they are of how to become white.

Sara believes that if she is to survive, that is, if she is to attain the American dream, she must become more white. As Joyce Carol Oates notes in "Imaginary Cities," in order for Sara to "save herself from suffocating in her ghetto-bound family she must become *American*" (16). As part of her attempt to fulfill the American dream by becoming white, Sara tries to reject all that is foreign about her. She begins by walking away from her Jewish culture, particularly the gender roles enforced by her father. One tradition she denies is that of arranged marriage: "'I'll never let no father marry me away to any old yok,'" she announces to herself (85). In making this statement, Sara is asserting that she does not want to be "foreign;" she wants to be white. "'Thank God, I'm not living in olden times. Thank God, I'm living in America . . . ! I'm going to live my own life. Nobody can stop me. I'm not from the old country. I'm American!'" (138). In articulating her identity as American, as white, Sara establishes her independence.

As part of this move toward independent American ideals, Sara embraces the notion of isolation and the nuclear family and rejects the traditional extended family by leaving them behind. Her mother comes to her and begs Sara to return to their home in Elizabeth by saying:

"I'd do anything for you. I'd give you away my life. But I can't take time to go 'way to Elizabeth. Every little minute must go to my studies My work goes on Sundays and holidays. I'm like a soldier in battle. I can't stop for visiting, even with my own family!" (171-78).

Sara sees herself as fighting against a system that would keep her from attaining whiteness: the culture of female domesticity and subservience at home in her Jewish community.

Another way she tries to become more normative is by altering her outward appearance, much like her sister, Mashah. She thinks that if she "could only live like the others and look like the others, they wouldn't pick on me so much" (181). So, she goes out and buys make-up and flowers to attach to her hat. "I looked in the glass at the new self I had made. Now I was exactly like the others! Red lips, red cheeks, even red roses under the brim of my hat. Blackened lashes, darkened eyebrows. Soft, white lace at my neck" (182). Like the others in the novel who put on the accouterments of whiteness, this performance fails her. People laugh at her when she goes in public, recognizing that this is a false performance and that she doesn't belong. Sara becomes "raw with the shame that I had tried to be like the rest and couldn't" (183). She has learned,

as did the other characters in the novel who attempted such a superficial performance, that whiteness is more than mere appearances.

Like her Americaner sister, Mashah, Sara determines that she must therefore change what is inside of her rather than what is on the outside in order to become a part of the normative white community. She decides to accomplish this by becoming more educated, patterning herself after the girl she read about in the newspaper. Because of this story of the American dream come to fruition, she thinks an education will provide a doorway to white normativity. "My only hope was to get to the educated world, where only the thoughts you give out count, and not how you look" (182). Once in school, Sara contemplates how best to become like the "real Americans" she sees: "How could I most quickly become friends with them? How could I come into their homes, exchange with them my thoughts, break with them bread at their tables . . . ? Maybe I'd have to change myself inside and out to be one of them. But how?" (211-14).

Just as it was for Mashah, this attempt to attain whiteness, to belong to the white community, is a project doomed to fail because she is participating in a culture which will always see her "as a stranger," as Gay Wilentz describes it in "Cultural Mediation and the Immigrant's

Daughter: Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers*" (34). As she moves away to college and is faced with the "real Americans" rather than her fictitious stories from the newspaper and Mashah, Sara realizes the fruitlessness of her efforts to belong:

I was nothing and nobody. It was worse than being ignored. Worse than being an outcast. I simply didn't belong. I had no existence in their young eyes So it wasn't character or brains that counted. Only youth and beauty and clothes-things I never had and never could have Even in college I had not escaped from the ghetto (220).

Sara's experience in college was, according to Brodtkin, quite common among Jewish immigrants in America. "Jews were the first of the Euro-immigrant groups to enter college in significant numbers, so it was not surprising that they faced the brunt of discrimination there" (30). Even more so, the social aspects of college life that Sara yearned for were also often unreachable for the Jewish immigrant co-ed. As Brodtkin puts it:

college was not about academic pursuits. It was about social connection-through its clubs, sports, and other activities, as well as in the friendships one was expected to forge with other children of elites. From

this, the real purpose of the college experience, Jews remained largely excluded (30-31).

Permanently marked as from the ghetto, as foreign and poor, Sara realizes she cannot pass as white, no matter how hard she works, no matter how much she studies. With this apprehension, she must find a new role to play within her definition as other.

Sara does this by reflecting upon and ultimately returning to the ghetto she had worked so hard to escape:

I realized that the time when I sold herring in Hester Street, I was learning life more than if I had gone to school. The fight with Father to break away from home, the fight in the cafeteria for a piece of meat-when I went through those experiences I thought them privations and losses; now I saw them treasure chests of insight. What countless riches lay buried under the ground of those early years that I had thought so black, so barren, so thwarted with want! (223).

Disillusioned as she is, Sara clearly still feels drawn to the white norm: "Where was I going now, will I be able to find these real American people again-that draw me so?" (233). Sara's return to her past, is therefore, not a rejection of white normativity. On the contrary, her place back in Hester Street allows her to perform the whiteness she had always dreamed of. While she is unable to do so

among the real Americans she so admires, Sara is able to perform whiteness among the foreigners back home because by contrast she has become white. In other words, among whites she is foreign and other, but among foreign immigrants, she can be white.

As she heads home, Sara sees herself as having attained her goal:

How grand it felt to lean back in my chair, a person among people . . . As I spread out my white, ironed, napkin on my lap, I thought of the time only four years before, when I pinched pieces out of the loaf, wiped my mouth with a corner of a newspaper and threw it under the seat (237).

She thinks further, "I had fought my way up into the sunshine of plenty" (238). Unlike the girl who had gone away to college hoping to lose her status as foreign, Sara has become a successful educator, ready to demonstrate her new, more white, self to those she left behind. "Home! Back to New York! Sara Smolinsky, from Hester Street, changed into a person!" (237). Rather than being marked as other (as, of course, she was in the white community), Sara has become "a person:" a member of the white norm in the eyes of the immigrant community.

Her separation from her family and its culture is noted several times upon Sara's return. Her father asks

her, "'was that what they taught you in college, to turn your back on your own people?'" (246). When told to tear her new suit at her mother's funeral, a ritual which demonstrates a family member's grief, she protests: "'I don't believe in this. It's my only suit, and I need it for work. Tearing it wouldn't bring Mother back to life again' A hundred eyes burned me with their condemnation. 'Look at her, the *Americanerin!*'" 255). The suit functions as an emblem of her white facade. Indeed, while she needs this suit for her work, she also needs it to maintain her identity as an *Americanerin*. Without it, Sara fears she would be just like them.

Sara's job also enables her to perform whiteness, for through her job she teaches the children how to behave more normatively. "My children used to murder the language as I did when I was a child of Hester Street. And I wanted to give them that better speech that the teachers in college had tried to knock into me" (271). Just like the lessons of whiteness she learned in college, the lessons Sara wants to provide these children with are tools to succeed in white culture. To one student, for example, she exclaims, "'Oh, Aby!' I cried. 'And you want to be a lawyer! Don't you know the judges will laugh you out of court if you plead your case with 'ain't it'?'" (271). Sara knows that Aby's future as a lawyer is contingent upon his ability to speak their

language properly. In teaching her students how to speak and behave within the norm, Sara is preparing them for a more successful ascent toward whiteness.

Sara contemplates her position as she returns to her childhood neighborhood: "I suddenly realized that I had come back to where I had started twenty years ago when I began my fight for freedom. But in my rebellious youth, I thought I could escape by running away. And now I realized that the shadow of the burden was always following me . . ." (295). The burden of otherness is heavy for Sara. Through her education and her ability to understand the fluidity of whiteness, Sara is able to construct a white performance she can live with. While others fail to perform whiteness, Sara succeeds. Her success is based on her exposure to "real Americans." While characters such as Mashah and Max perform a whiteness based on fiction, just as Sara did initially, Sara's performance is based on what she has learned among the "real"/white Americans.

Sara ultimately learns that, while she cannot perform whiteness among them, she can take her lessons and perform whiteness among those who are outsiders. She is participating in a separate sphere of identity, what Brodkin calls the "Yiddishkeit." The "Yiddishkeit" is "the culture of Jewish immigrants" that was "very Anglo-Saxon-like" (183). Like the Amercanerin, who takes on the

external elements of normativity, the "Yiddishkeit" serve as the ideal of whiteness within the Jewish community. In other words, in the white community Sara is a Jewish foreigner, but among the Jewish immigrant community, she can attain the white performance of the American dream come true.

The Jungle

Like *The Bread Givers*, the American dream is a strong element in *The Jungle*, as well. Jurgis and his family feel that hard work will bring about their economic, and thereby social, success. The day they arrive in the United States, their first goal, Like Sara's, is to find work, to begin their journey toward the American dream:

All that a mere man could do, it seemed to Jurgis, was to take a [job] like this as he found it, and do as he was told; to be given a place in it and a share in its wonderful activities was a blessing to be grateful for, as one was grateful for the sunshine and the rain (51).

Jurgis expects that, in moving to the United States, he will be able to slip into the fold, to join in the line of workers and share in the bounty he envisioned.

As with the characters in *The Bread Givers*, this equation of hard work and just rewards is a foregone

conclusion for Jurgis. "He would go to America and be a rich man in the bargain" (29). It is a given that "a man [has] the right to ask [for] a chance to do something useful, and to get good pay for doing it" (71). What Jurgis learns as the novel progresses and his otherness is made more and more clear is that this dream is unattainable for him. While he begins the novel asking, "'Do you want me to believe that with these arms . . . that with these arms people will ever let me starve?'" (27), Jurgis learns that his well being is of no concern to the white system, and in order to find success within this system, one must be white.

Jurgis' confidence in his ability to succeed is based on the strength and vitality of his body. The arms he so proudly displays and brags about are symbols of his power. Such a construction of masculinity and whiteness was a growing theme in American literature at the time the novel was written, according to Amy Kaplan in "Romancing the Empire: The Embodiment of American Masculinity in the Popular Historical Novel of the 1890s." As the 19th century came to a close,

the culture at large was in the process of redefining white middle class masculinity from a republican quality of character based on self-control and social responsibility to a corporeal essence identified with

the vigor and prowess of the individual male body"

(Kaplan 223).

Jurgis' physical strength reinforces his belief in the attainability of the American ideal and his place within normative whiteness. His mantra, "I will work harder" (87), shows his confidence in this aesthetic. As Jurgis learns as the novel progresses, having the right body, whether it be in skin tone or physique, is not enough.

What is first established in the novel, however, is that Jurgis and his family are not white; they are foreign and thereby outside of the white norm. The novel opens with a wedding party, the *veselija*, in which their otherness to white culture is carefully documented. "After their best home traditions" (5), they have this wedding celebration in a room with words like "Pasilinksminimams darzas" and "Sznapsas" on the walls, words which "the reader . . . will be glad of the explanation" (6). With the music "which changes the place . . . to a fairy place, a wonderland, a little corner of the high mansions of the sky" (9) and dancing, which is "a maze of flying skirts and bodies, quite dazzling to look upon" (16), these are clearly not people within the norm. Even their clothes are commented upon: "Of these older people many wear clothing reminiscent in some detail of home . . . All these things are carefully avoided by the young, most of whom have learned to speak

English and to affect the latest style of clothing" (14). The young, those who are trying to assimilate, wear the latest clothing in order to try to reflect white culture. Those recently arrived to the United States and the older people unwilling to change, wear foreign garb. They still remember their homeland and embrace its culture, an act that marks them as outsiders.

Jurgis first feels his sense of otherness through his inability to speak English. As we saw with Sara, English hinders white immigrants' entry into white society. When he first seeks work, Jurgis can only say one word: "job." Jurgis gets work but is unable to fully understand all he encounters. "'It is plain,' say the people he encounters, 'that you have come from the country, and from very far in the country'" (28). When his boss "gave him a good cursing but as Jurgis did not understand a word of it, he did not object" (53), Jurgis is outside the norm, unable to recognize the operations of society and the role he plays. All Jurgis understands is that his hard work will eventually erase his difference.

Jurgis is further made aware of his otherness through the form of work he finds. At first, Jurgis does not think anything of his role in the work force; in fact, he is proud that he has gotten a job so quickly and is able to participate in the American ideal through work: "now he had been admitted; he was a part of it all!" (51). He thinks his vision of the American dream is coming to fruition. As the job toils on, however, Jurgis begins to realize he is no better, no more important in the eyes of his employers than they very animals he slaughters. "He had stood and watched the hog killing, and thought how cruel and savage it was, [but] a hog was just what he had been: one of the packers' hogs" (376). Jurgis slowly understands that his place in the greater system is a small one. He is merely a cog in a wheel, a very common position for European immigrants at the time, as Brodtkin notes. "Driven labor," such as the work Jurgis performs,

became a 'natural' way to organize mass production, a function of responding to competition and to demand on the one hand, and to reliance on 'inferior' workers on the other. In turn, degraded forms of work confirmed the apparent obviousness of the racial inferiority of the workers who did it (58).

As an inferior worker, Jurgis is not important to the world at large. His employers could easily do without him.

As a non-essential member of the work force, Jurgis exists outside their definition of whiteness. His unskilled job is very divisive. It was only when immigrants took jobs such as Jurgis' that, according to Brodtkin, "Americans [came] to believe that Europe was made up of a variety of inferior and superior races" (56). Jurgis is despised as other because he is a laborer. Those who perform whiteness are

as far removed as the poles from the most skilled worker on the killing beds; he would dress differently, and live in another part of the town, and come to work a different hour of the day, and in every way make sure that he did not rub elbows with the labouring-man. Perhaps this was due to the repulsiveness of the work; at any rate, the people who worked with their hands were a class apart, and were made to feel it (124).

Jurgis' position is double-sided: on the one hand, he is confined to the separate class of worker because he is foreign, while on the other, his otherness is defined by his unskilled job. He becomes even more a part of society's fringe because he is a laborer. These definitions of otherness push him further and further outside the definitions of normalcy.

Once he loses his job in the slaughterhouse and is forced to take a job in the fertilizer plant, Jurgis'

otherness becomes more evident. This work is the ultimate abasement. "The stuff was half an inch deep in his skin: his whole system was full of it, and it would have taken a week not merely of scrubbing, but of vigorous exercise, to get it out of him" (157). Like Sara's sister, Bessie, Jurgis has become his job, a job that is revolting to the normative. As he gets on a trolley after his first day at work in the fertilizer plant,

the people in the car began to grasp and sputter, to put handkerchiefs to their noses, and transfix him with furious glances. Jurgis only knew that a man in front of him immediately got up and gave him a seat; and that half a minute later the two people on each side of him got up; and that in a full minute the crowded car was nearly empty--those passengers who could not get room on the platform having gotten out to walk (157).

His smell disgusts them, but more than his odor, his place as other overpowers them as well. His odor is not only the smell of the sweat and grime of hard labor; it is also the smell of failure, a symbol that no matter how hard one may work, failure awaits them. His failure mirrors their anxieties about the precariousness of white normativity.

These people who see Jurgis in this light are not the only ones whose gaze is fixed upon him. At various points in the novel, the narrator refers to the visitors who

observe the work the characters in the novel perform. With the workers in the fertilizer plant, for example, the narrator states that "these people could not be shown to the visitor, for the odour of a fertilizer-man would scare any ordinary visitor at a hundred yards . . ." (120). The workers, like Jurgis, thereby become objects for the white gaze, the observed other. In this sense, the visitors are like the travelers in postcolonial literature. Such a use of narrative observation is reminiscent of what Lawrence Buell calls the "utilitarian bias in U.S. literary thought" (209) in his essay "Postcolonial Anxiety in Classic U.S. Literature." According to Buell, American literature is a "legitimation of art as a vehicle for useful informational content and/or improving moral reflection" (209). In observing the workers, the visitors give distance to the workers' plight while further highlighting the workers' distance from white normativity. The "ordinary visitor" is the cultural norm, the invisible white standard of ordinariness and normalcy.

The use of the visitor enables the narrator to expose the reader to the grotesque. The reader is, in fact, introduced to some of the very horrors the novel is famous for through the eyes of the visitor. The tour group at the first plant Jurgis works for gives the narrator an opportunity to describe the various goings on of the plant. These elements of the job are explained to Jurgis, who

joins the tour group as well, as "the greatest aggregation of labour and capital ever gathered in one place . . ."

(51). While they are told of the splendors they are looking at, the observers also notice "the tense set face, with the two wrinkles graven in the forehead, and the ghastly pallor of the cheeks; and then [they] would suddenly recollect that it was time [they were] going on" (160). Unlike the workers being described, the visitors can leave at anytime. They are the white norm looking upon the foreign, the "well-dressed ladies and gentlemen who came to stare at [them], as at some wild beast in a menagerie" (161). In essence, these characters are the embodiment of the reader.

As such, the imagined reader plays an intrinsic role in the dichotomy of whiteness. The narrator refers to the reader as a sort of visitor at several points in the novel. Calling the characters "our friends" (42) sets up a visible division between the readers and the characters; we are not expected to understand their plight because we are the white visitors looking upon the foreign other. The use of the word "our" also creates a coersive alliance between the reader and the narrator, a move which further sentimentalizes the novel. "The reader, who perhaps has never held much converse in the language of far-off Lithuania . . ." (6), needs things explained. These characters are presented as something to marvel at, to pity, as outside the white norm of the "ordinary" reader.

The narrator further separates the characters from the white norm of the assumed reader by depending on many animal metaphors to describe the plight and personalities of Jurgis and his family. From a "savage beast" (153) to a "dumb beast of burden" (171), these characters are portrayed as very animalistic, as characters of nature. When Jurgis attacks the man who raped his wife, it is like watching a wild animal attack someone:

Things swam blood before him, and he screamed aloud in his fury, lifting his victim and smashing his head upon the floor It was only when a half dozen men had seized him by the legs and shoulders and were pulling him, that he understood that he was losing his prey. In a flash he had bent down and sunk his teeth into the man's cheek; and when they tore him away he was dripping with blood, and little ribbons of skin were hanging in his mouth (183).

While their behavior is often spoken of in animalistic terms, so too are their emotions. As little Stanislovas fights back when forced to go to work for fear of freezing to death, the narrator tells us that "the best dog will turn cross if he be kept chained all the time . . ." (144). The treatment these people receive in society is likened to the treatment given to animals. Jurgis recognizes this as his luck begins to wear out. He thinks to himself that "He was of no consequence; he was flung aside, like a bit of

trash, the carcass of some animal. It was horrible, horrible!" (192).

Being seen as such, Jurgis comes to realize that this world he has traveled so far to see does not want him:

There was no place for him anywhere--every direction he turned his gaze this fact was forced upon him; the residences, with their heavy walls and bolted doors. . . ; the great warehouses filled with the products of the whole world, and guarded by iron shutters and heavy gates; the banks with their unthinkable billions of wealth, all buried in safes and vaults of steel (278).

Like Sara's experience in college, Jurgis' experience over time teaches him that he cannot belong to white society. No matter how hard he works, this paradigm of white normativity has no room for him, no place for him to go. Jurgis comes to understand that he "had come there, and thought he was going to make himself useful, and rise and become a skilled man; but he would soon find out his error--for nobody rose in Packingtown by doing good work" (74). While he believed work would enable him to become successful and join the norm, Jurgis learns that the culture he has moved to has only one position for him as a worker: outside.

Along with his economic failures, Jurgis is unable to succeed as a white male as well. When he is injured, Jurgis is frustrated because he can no longer use his body:

In truth, it was almost maddening for a strong man like him, a fighter, to have to lie there helpless on his back . . . Before this he had met life with a welcome—it had its trials, but none that a man could not face. But now, in the night-time, when he lay tossing about, there would come stalking into his chamber a grisly phantom, the sight of which made his flesh curl and his hair to bristle up. It was like seeing the world falling away from underneath his feet (139-40).

Demasculinized by his injuries, Jurgis has lost the strength that he believed could save him and his family. This new position undermines the very foundation of his world and causes him to recognize that he can no longer attain the goals he had set for himself. Jurgis is unable to “prove his virility . . . by acting before the eyes of a domestic audience” (Kaplan 224). He has been further distanced by his failure to maintain white masculinity.

Jurgis’ final disillusionment comes with the death of his wife, Ona. This is a pivotal point in the novel for reasons similar to the loss of his masculine vitality. Without his wife to care for, Jurgis has lost all sense of himself as a man. As Kaplan notes, masculinity in the

chivalric code is dependent upon a fragile female in need of rescuing:

The romance hero asserts his virility in more complex forms than the self-reliant frontier violence we might expect. The chivalric rescue narrative makes him dependent on the liberation and subjugation of the willing heroine, a composite figure for the subject and object of imperial power (221).

Consequently, Ona's death means that Jurgis no longer has a woman who needs him, and he is therefore unable to live up to this chivalric code. When Jurgis realizes that his wife is dead, "an icy horror of loneliness seized him; he saw himself standing apart and watching all the world fade away from him—a world of shadows, of fickle dreams" (228). The dreams of whiteness Jurgis once held as dear are now a thing of the past because he does not have the economic, bodily, or social means to attain them. Jurgis must find a new model to follow outside of white normativity.

With this realization, Jurgis looks for other ways to succeed. He begins this transformation by running away and rejecting society as a whole. On the road, he washes all traces of his past, a past in which he had faith in the American dream:

the water was warm, and he splashed about like a very boy in glee. Afterward he sat down in the water near the bank, and proceeded to scrub himself--soberly and

methodically, scouring every inch of him with sand.

While he was doing it he would do it thoroughly, and see how it felt to be clean (256).

Jurgis also rejects what he had fought so hard for while his belief the American dream existed: he turns down work for the first time in the novel. With this rejection of work and cleansing of the work that had become a part of him, Jurgis turns away from the very notions of the American dream that had driven him on.

With his faith in the American dream shattered, Jurgis looks for other avenues of success. He finds them in the corrupt system that feeds upon those that believe in the American dream. Jurgis rejects the American dream as a mode of becoming white and turns to the corrupt system that takes advantage of the failures of nonwhites to participate in the American success story. He accomplishes this transition by moving into the political world, by using his strength to manipulate people rather than meat or fertilizer. With this move, comes the success Jurgis had so often worked for: "A month ago Jurgis had all but perished of starvation upon the streets; and now suddenly, as by the gift of a magic key, he had entered into a world where money and all the good things of life came freely" (304). This magic key is Jurgis' understanding that the system he believed in does not include him. With this transformation, Jurgis finds the fulfilling work he had previously sought:

"He had now something to work for, to struggle for. He soon found that if he kept his wits about him he would come upon new opportunities" (306). These new opportunities are a far cry from his days in the fertilizer plant. Where once he frightened the public with his otherness, Jurgis now goes "with a new set now, young unmarried fellows who were 'sporty'. Jurgis had long ago cast off his fertilizer clothing, and since going into politics he had donned a linen collar and a greasy red necktie" (316). His new clothing, like his new identity, allows him to participate in the white norm, albeit on the fringes of society.

Up until this point in the novel, Jurgis had been focused on becoming white through work. Now he sees himself as privileged in a hierarchy of otherness. He notices "negroes and the lowest foreigners--Greeks, Roumanians, Sicilians, and Slovaks" (322). These people are less white than Jurgis and are shunned as "a throng of stupid black negroes and foreigners who could not understand a word that was said to them . . ." (322). Jurgis has had to forget his early days in Chicago when he too knew no English. In understanding the gradations of whiteness and his role on its fringes, Jurgis establishes clear divisions between himself and these others.

In positioning himself within this hierarchical structure of being outside whiteness, Jurgis is able to more critically analyze white performativity. From this

vantage point, Jurgis comes to recognize that the American dream that pushed him forward, that encouraged him to move up the hierarchy of the Capitalist structure in order to attain whiteness, is merely a fantasy. Jurgis does not develop this new understanding of wage labor in Capitalist society alone; he comes to this conclusion through his indoctrination into the Socialist underground.

Like the Finns who were inclined toward Socialism, according to Peter Kivisto in *Immigrant Socialists in the United States*, Jurgis turns to Socialism for answers. He has an interest "in the acquisition of forms of knowledge that could provide both an adequate comprehension of the present and some certitude concerning the contours of the future" (92). Socialism also provides this understanding of the present for Jurgis. In grappling with his past, Jurgis finds solace in the Socialist movement. The people Jurgis encounters in the Socialist movement see the flaws in the American dream that has been corrupted by greed and help Jurgis understand the futility of his attempts to achieve success through the American dream: "'In America everyone had laughed at the mere idea of Socialism then--in America all men were free. As if political liberty made wage-slavery any more tolerable!'" (374). To Jurgis, Socialism reveals the myths upon which the American ideals are based. It articulates Upton Sinclair's belief in the hypocrisy of the capitalist system, as well as an alternative to this

social structure. We can see Sinclair's sense of this in many of his non-fiction writings, including the epistolary *The Way Out: What Lies Ahead for America*: "What men seek is power. They want to express their personalities and exercise their faculties. In our business world, money is power . . . In a Socialist society, such as I am proposing, power will be granted by public consent" (93). Socialism is a panacea for the issues Jurgis has encountered based on capitalist greed. Socialism articulates for Jurgis what he has learned through his own experience: the American dream is a ploy for driving people to work in order to attain normalcy.

Jurgis sees hope for himself within the Socialist movement, for here he is not othered. According to Kivisto, the Socialist movement often served as a place to build community for European immigrants:

The new organizations [of Socialism] performed many of the duties usually associated with fraternal societies . . . In short, these organizations [became] the center of social life for many in the ethnic community, extending well beyond the number of formal members (96).

Whereas the normative culture Jurgis strove toward in the beginning of the novel emphasized separation and isolation from those around you, the Socialist movement provides the

social belonging and sense of self and power Jurgis has craved throughout the novel:

He would no longer be the sport of circumstances, he would be a man, with a will and a purpose; he would have something to fight for, something to die for, if need be! Here were men who would show him and help him; and he would have friends and allies, he would dwell in the sight of justice, and walk arm-in-arm with power (368).

The Socialist movement enables Jurgis to regain the power he had lost by giving him a supportive community rather than competitors for employment. Ironically, the Socialist movement gives Jurgis what the American dream had promised: a sense of belonging.

Jurgis and Sara follow very similar paths and goals, aspirations that are ultimately based on the flawed assumption of the attainability of white performance. Both characters try to acquire whiteness through work and finally realize that they will never be able to truly be white, to be "real Americans." This epiphany comes at a price for Jurgis and Sara for it causes them to reflect on their own cultural performances and to renegotiate their performative identities. By closely evaluating their positions, however, Jurgis and Sara are able to stake their claim in less-chartered territory. While Sara maintains her façade of whiteness within the safety of the Jewish ghetto,

Jurgis redefines the definitions of normalcy by abandoning them altogether to join the Socialist movement. Even though they arrive at different destinations in their journeys, both Jurgis and Sara further flesh out the delicate division between whiteness and otherness. Their stories show that being "real" is a very complicated act.

ⁱYezierska embraces this assumption whole-heartedly in *The Bread Givers*, showing Sara's success as a result of her hard work, while Sinclair mocks Jurgis' assumption that "I'll work harder" will bring about a resolution to his family's poverty.

CHAPTER 4

"A WORLD AND LIFE OF HIS OWN:"

MURDER AND WHITE PERFORMANCE IN *NATIVE SON*

The brutish Negro seemed indifferent to his fate, as though the inquests, trials, and even the looming certainty of the electric chair held no terror for him. He acted like an earlier missing link in the human species. He seemed out of place in a white man's civilization (260).

Native Son

In *The Ethics of Living Jim Crow*, Richard Wright details the training he received as a young man in the south. After his initial lesson in which he is injured by white boys in a fight, Wright's lessons about living as a black man in America stem from his role as a worker. As he enters each job, Wright is forced into the white world and is therefore required to perform as expected in that culture. As "the folks at home" tell him after he loses his job at the optical company, "you got to 'stay in your place' if you want to keep working" (8). In his job at a hotel, Wright is able to perform as expected: "I had learned my Jim Crow lessons so thoroughly that I kept the hotel job till I left Jackson for Memphis" (13). His knowledge of the rules for performing in the cultural center of the white world, learned while working within it, allows him to keep his job and keep working.

As we learn from its function in his autobiographical depiction of cultural training, work for Wright reinforces cultural performance. Furthermore, Wright subscribes to the traditional view of work as a mode of self-expression. As George E. Kent in "Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture" describes it, Wright possesses "a personal tension [that] springs from a stubborn self, conscious of victimization but obsessed with its right to a full engagement of universal forces and to a reaping of the fruits due from the engagement" (19). Wright's attachment to traditional American definitions of the self is frustrated by that tradition's essential dependency on the hierarchical exclusion of the cultural underclass. In Wright's self-history, work serves as the point of disruption for the conflicting ideologies that, on the one hand, a hard worker can succeed, and, on the other, that African-Americans should not act out of their assigned cultural place.

Work operates in a similar fashion in Wright's novel, *Native Son*, as well. However, in this novel, work is not only a site for cultural analysis but a mode of expression. Bigger's desire to perform his ascribed identity, that which is inscribed and imposed upon him, drives him to work. Through work, Bigger performs his cultural position, grappling with his connection to his race, class, and gender, a struggle that ultimately requires him to resolve

his performative identity by attempting to transgress these traditional work performances. For Bigger, work becomes a site of disruption, the terrain upon which his identity is reinforced and redefined.

Along this mode of resolving identity via work, Bigger's performativity is rendered through his work. Bigger derives his selfhood from within his work performance. His sense of self within his work develops from an understanding of his place in the culture at large. However, his desire to conform to the cultural traditions of his ascribed identity is also troubled through the performance of work. In fact, his work performance seems to conflict with his sense of autonomy when the work fulfills his desire for conformity. In other words, through work Bigger Thomas both participates in and resists the performances ascribed to him, both reads the master's book and rips out its pages, to use the metaphor of Kimberly W. Benton in "The Veil of Black: (Un)masking the Subject of African-American Modernism's *Native Son*." In looking at Bigger's work desire, then, we can understand how Bigger encounters these pages, and how he attempts to attain the privilege inherent in white performance through both his role as worker and his role as criminal. Ultimately, we will see how Bigger's attraction to the privileges of whiteness draws him in and how his attempt to gain power

through both normative and transgressive means is thwarted by the cultural necessity of racial division.

Bigger is a man frustrated by his position in society. As he kills the rat in the opening scene of the novel, we recognize a clear reflection between himself and the rat whose mode of escape is covered. Like the rat who "squealed and leaped at Bigger's trouser-leg and snagged it in his teeth, hanging on" (9), Bigger is a man desperate to escape the circumstance of his race. As Richard Wright comments in his analysis of Bigger Thomas in the novel's introduction, Bigger was created after a type of African-American Wright had encountered frequently during his childhood in the south. Bigger was a conglomeration of the men he had seen who shared a similar response to the oppression that fell upon their heads within the Jim Crow system. A "Bigger," in Wright's experience, revolted against this system for two reasons, as Wright tells us:

First, through a quirk of circumstances, he had become estranged from the religion and folk culture of his race. Second, he was trying to react to and answer the call of the dominant civilization whose glitter came to him through the newspapers, magazines, radios, movies, and the mere imposing sight and sound of daily American life (xiii).

In other words, Bigger, as a type of man, is one whose religion and folk culture have been replaced with white

mainstream culture, a culture that at its very essence promotes such middle class ideals as the protestant work ethic and the separation of race, class and gender.

We see the elements of this type reflected in Bigger. First, he is estranged from his own culture, looking upon those around him with disgust: "he hated his family because he knew they were suffering and that he was powerless to help them" (13). He looks upon them with loathing, finding no solace in their love, only repulsion in their poverty and their lack of privilege. Second, Bigger is drawn to whiteness because of the images he sees in the media. He buys into this model of normalcy, and in so doing, attempts to perform within the paradigm as it applies to African-American maleness. In this sense, Wright's character is "somewhere between repetition and irony, representation and parody, incorporation and appropriation, imitation and critique," as Benston describes the authors of slave narratives. Estranged from the performance of whiteness, yet drawn to the culture built around the normative identity of whiteness, Bigger renders his given role within that paradigm with precision. He at once sees himself as a part of and separated from the white cultural order. Wright's discussion of Bigger reveals some of Bigger's desire for attaining normalcy when he describes Bigger as having a part of him which

the common people take for granted We live by an idealism that makes us believe that the Constitution is a good document of government, that the Bill of Rights is a good legal and humane principal to safeguard our civil liberties, that every man and woman should have the opportunity to realize himself, to seek his own individual fate and goal, his own peculiar and untranslatable destiny. I don't say that Bigger knew this in the terms in which I am speaking of it; I don't say that any such thought ever entered his head. But he knew it emotionally, intuitively, for his emotions and his desires were developed, and he caught it, as most of us do, from the mental and emotional climate of our time (xxiv-xxv).

This unspoken belief system, this belief in the truth of the culture at large, is closely tied to the Protestant work ethic. This ethic states that hard work will bring about good rewards, that the realization of self Wright alludes to can be found in the world of work. But, as we learn in *Native Son*, the only world that this belief system applies to (that of whiteness) is restricted from Bigger.

We first see the conflict of Bigger's desire to perform according to the white normative belief system when Bigger shows his desire to become a pilot. While talking to

his friend, Gus, Bigger watches an airplane fly high above him, and he comments on his desire to pilot that plane:

"I *could* fly a plane if I had a chance," Bigger said.

"If you wasn't black and if you had some money and if they'd let you go to aviation school, you *could* fly a plane," Gus said.

For a moment Bigger contemplated all the 'ifs' that Gus had mentioned. Then both boys broke into hard laughter . . . (20).

These "ifs" are what keep Bigger from achieving the type of job he wants. He wants to live the American dream, the ideal in which hard working people can attain their goals, including such lofty goals as flying a plane. Bigger understands the desires of white America, the ideals that he admires, but he recognizes that a barrier keeps him from attaining them: his race.

Consequently, Bigger is frustrated by the identity ascribed upon him. In order to survive, Bigger knows he must suppress the rage inside him. "'I just can't get used to it,'" Bigger tells Gus. "'I swear to God I can't. I know I oughtn't think about it, but I can't help it. Every time I think about it I feel like somebody's poking a red-hot iron down my throat" (23). Later, he continues his conversation with Gus: "'It's like fire That's when I feel like something awful's going to happen to me Naw; it ain't like something going to happen to me. It's .

. . It's like I was going to do something I can't help . .
." (24). Bigger's anger is an invisible fire; he knows too
well the fury he has inside, but he must keep it hidden
from the world at large. In other words, Bigger cannot act
out his anger. He must try not to think about, to face, the
privilege of whiteness in order to maintain a performance
of compliance.

Bigger has been able to maintain this distance from
his anger because he has been able to keep from interacting
with white normativity. He stays in his area of town, the
Black Belt, and only interacts with people of his own race
as much as he can. He fears encounters with whites, even
starting a fight with Gus in order to keep from robbing
one. As he bullies Gus, Bigger thinks to himself:

they had never held up a white man before. They had
always robbed Negroes. They felt that it was much
easier and safer to rob their own people . .

..[robbing whites] would be a trespassing into a
territory where the full wrath of an alien world would
be turned loose upon them (18).

Bigger understands the difference in importance between his
world and the world of whites and uses this division to his
advantage. More than this, Bigger is better able to
maintain his cultural performance and sanity by distancing
himself from the privilege of whiteness. Otherwise, as we
learn as the novel progresses and Bigger is unable to

distance himself, he will no longer be able to contain his violence.

With such separation between himself and the white community, Bigger's understanding of the cultural paradigm of whiteness comes from the media, namely newspapers and movies. The first face Bigger sees upon leaving his apartment is that of Buckley, a man running for state's attorney general. Bigger examines the poster, noticing "the white face was fleshy but stern; one hand was uplifted and its index finger pointed straight out into the street at each passer-by. The poster showed one of those faces that look straight at you when you looked at it and all the while . . . it kept looking unblinkingly at you" (16). This face is watching him, as are all the eyes of white culture, watching him to see him fail. Even more so, Bigger is looking back, examining the face to determine what makes it white, what gives it privilege.

Basing his concept of whiteness on media such as this defines cultural identity for him. Being white or black, for Bigger, is a performance, an act that one can play. Bigger, in fact, "plays white" with Gus, a performance which depends upon Bigger's understanding of whiteness. Bigger's performance of whiteness is reflective of power, as he pretends to be an army general, a powerful "J. P. Morgan" making large economic decisions, and, finally, the president of the United States. All of these performances

are ones of power and white cultural expectations. If these were white boys, their play-acting would be reflective of their dreams, of their attainable goals. Because of their cultural position as black men, these performances are merely caricatures of a two-dimensional world they can only participate in on the periphery.

Even so, these parodies of whiteness reveal an underlying admiration and envy for the power they so sardonically mock. As Bigger's lawyer, Max, explains to the judge overlooking Bigger's case, the culture of affluence white performativity possesses is very enticing to Bigger:

How alluring, how dazzling it is! How it excites the senses! How it seems to dangle within easy reach of everyone the fulfillment of happiness! how constantly and overwhelmingly the advertisements, radios, newspapers, and movies play upon us! But in thinking of them remember that to many they are a token of mockery. These bright colors fill our hearts with elation, but to many they are daily taunts. Imagine a man walking amid such a scene, a part of it, and yet knowing that it is not for him! (363).

In describing the relationship between people such as Bigger and the white culture at large, the "us" in Max's speech, Max depicts the underlying frustration held by those who desire to conform to a cultural paradigm that includes them only as underlying and marginal characters.

Sure Bigger can participate in the normative but only as a chauffeur living above the kitchen or, as it finally turns out, as a rapist of white women.

At first, however, Bigger is looking for a way to break into the normative while still keeping the sense of pride he derives from the Protestant work ethic. Bigger wants to participate in the definitions of selfhood at the heart of the cultural paradigm he resists. As he watches the movie depiction of the white upper class, he is

filled with a sense of excitement about his new job.

Was what he heard about rich white people really true?

Was he going to work for people like he saw in the movies? . . . Maybe if he were working for them

something would happen and he would get some of it. He would just see how they did it. Sure, it was all a

game and white people knew how to play it (35-36).

Bigger sees his new job with the Daltons as his ticket to the game of normativity, to centrality. As Michael G. Cooke describes it, "The Beginnings of Self-Realization," Bigger, "under a threat of self-cancellation . . ., is seduced by materialism and then by images" (163). If only he can act his working part, can perform his job well, maybe he will "get some of it," some of the gains given to those who work hard.

Even though he is enticed by his own blind belief in the Protestant work ethic, Bigger's contemplation about his

new job and the mockery in "playing white" reveal Bigger's understanding of cultural positions as fundamentally performative acts. As a black man, Bigger can play white, just like Bigger acts as he is expected when working for the Daltons. But Bigger also shows that his role as servant, as Gus' role as thug and Dalton's role as rich white man, is a performative position. These are culturally constructed performances, acts which place the person within the context of the normative. In playing their assigned roles, these characters participate and perpetuate the normative order.

This movement towards white privilege culminates in the movie theater scene, for this scene serves as a transition between the Bigger who won't rob Blume, the white store owner, and a Bigger who wants to participate in all that Blume's whiteness represents. As touched on earlier, when Bigger sees media depictions of whiteness, when

he read the newspapers or magazines, went to the movies . . . , he felt what he wanted: to merge himself with others and be a part of this world, to lose himself in it so he could find himself, to be allowed a chance to live like others, even though he was black (226).

This feeling comes out very strongly during the scene in which Bigger watches the two films. As he watches *The Gay*

Woman, Bigger sees himself within the film, and thinks to himself

Was what he heard about rich white people really true? Was he going to work for people like he saw in the movies? If he were, then he'd see a lot of things from the inside; he'd get the dope, the low-down. [After,] he looked at *Trader Horn* unfold and saw pictures of naked black men and women whirling in wild dances and heard drums beating and gradually the African scene changed and was replaced in his own mind of white men and women . . . (36).

Where once whites were the oppressors who took away all possibility of survival, now they are a performance perhaps he can attain. Rather than stay among the black community represented in *Trader Horn*, Bigger sees a world of opportunity in the white community for within their world, Bigger can learn the role of the privileged.

Consequently, when the Daltons first interview Bigger for his new job, Bigger is afraid of not acting as he is expected for if he fails to perform correctly, he will lose his opportunity to participate in the cultural center. As he walks up to the Dalton's house, he contemplates if they would "expect him to come in the front way or back?" (45). This first problem with Bigger's performance brings out both fear and anger: fear in transgressing cultural expectations and anger in being forced to perform a

restrictive role rather than being given the perceived freedom endowed to whites. Bigger fumbles during his interview, and "he hated himself at that moment. Why was he acting and feeling this way? He wanted to wave his hand and blot out the white man who was making him feel like this. If not that, he wanted to blot himself out" (50). Bigger is frustrated at himself for both faltering in his performance as a servant and in being forced to perform this role rather than the roles he had access to when "playing white." Bigger's thoughts are followed by a description of his own performance: "He had not raised his eyes to the level of Mr. Dalton's face since he had been in the house. He stood with his knees slightly bent, his lips partly open, his shoulders stooped; and his eyes held a look that went only to the surface of things. *There was an organic conviction in him that this was the way white folks wanted him to be in their presence*" (emphasis added, 50). His behavior, then, is based on cultural expectations of what it means to be a working black man. Because Bigger wants to be a part of the cultural paradigm of the Protestant work ethic, Bigger can act out his assigned roles and can thereby take part in the cultural paradigm he has learned to admire. While he realizes he cannot be white, he wants to get as close as possible to them so he can reap the benefits of their privilege.

What Bigger encounters when he meets the Daltons, however, differs from what he had imagined based on media depictions. First and foremost, Bigger is preoccupied with the Daltons' color, particularly in how it separates them from himself. Mrs. Dalton is "completely white; she seemed to him like a ghost" (48). By focusing on her whiteness, Bigger maintains his division of black and white. His attention to whiteness makes the Daltons seem less real. The ethereal metaphors of the ghost for Mrs. Dalton and her strangely attentive cat, for example, distance them from Bigger. It shows that "to Bigger and his kind white people were not really people; they were a sort of great natural force" (109). In this relationship, Bigger is distant enough to see them as "alien" (45); therefore, he can maintain his separation and keep his anger at bay.

He is further disconnected from the Daltons through the forms of white privilege he sees enforced in the Dalton household. The most striking is how they talk about Bigger in front of him. Mrs. Dalton asks pointed questions about Bigger without addressing him, for example. Even without eye contact because of her blindness, Mrs. Dalton is able to "not move her body or face as she talked" and speak "in a tone of voice that indicated that she was speaking to Bigger" (48). Mr. Dalton, who owns the South Side Real Estate Company that keeps his family living in impoverished conditions, also asks a lot of questions of Bigger,

particularly questions about his living conditions. Following these questions, Mr. Dalton further performs his privilege by briefly ignoring Bigger: "Wordlessly, the white man sat behind the desk and picked up the paper and looked at it in a long silence. Bigger watched him with lowered eyes" (54). His privilege as a white man of power is to talk and be silent when he likes. Bigger's role, then, is to silently wait with averted eyes.

The act of privilege that most disturbs Bigger is the sense that the world of whiteness is filled with secrets he will never be able to know: "This was a cold and distant world; a world of white secrets carefully guarded" (45). These secrets make Bigger feel self-conscious and uncomfortable because they are not clearly defined privileges. During his interview, the Daltons "made him uneasy, tense, as though there were influences and presences about him which he could feel but not see" (48). These secret privileges of whiteness destabilize Bigger initially because, without a scripted mode of performance, Bigger will be more aware of his anger at this system of exclusion.

Once he becomes more accustomed to the Daltons, Bigger believes he can find happiness in his new role because he has gained privilege. While it is not the privilege of full-fledged whiteness, it is an entrance to their world. When he goes to his room at the Dalton's, a room at the

back of the house above the basement, he is able to reevaluate his situation more carefully than he was in the Daltons' presence. With this evaluation, Bigger determines that his job is to his liking. "There were a lot of new things he could get. Oh, boy! This would be the easy life" (60). His room will give him the privilege of privacy, a privacy unavailable to him in the South Side Chicago room he shares with his mother, sister, and brother. He will also have the luxury of money and the ability to drive a nice car. These things fill Bigger with a sense of excitement and a feeling of power: "He had a keen sense of power when driving; the feel of a car added something to him" (63).

What is even more exciting for Bigger is that, in Bigger's mind, he will be treated like family. As Peggy, the Irish housekeeper puts it, "they're Christian people and believe in everybody working hard, and living a clean life. Some people think we ought to have more servants than we do, but we get along. It's just like one big family" (57). Because she is Irish and therefore outside of normative whiteness, Bigger sees a reflection of himself in Peggy. She has been able to become "like" a member of the Dalton family. Peggy has been able to successfully perform her working identity and consequently feels a part of the Daltons' white privilege. Bigger sees her success as a hint of his own future.

But this arrangement is quickly threatened by Mary and Jan. Mary Dalton disrupts this arrangement because she does not act within the cultural norms of white upper class young women. She confuses Bigger by both maintaining and transgressing all he has been trained to expect from white women.

She puzzled him. She was rich, but she didn't act like she was rich. She acted like . . . Well, he didn't know exactly what she did act like. In all of the white women he had met, mostly on jobs and at the relief stations, there was always a certain coldness and reserve; they stood their distance and spoke to him from afar. But this girl waded right in and hit him between the eyes with her words and ways (60).

Unlike the women he has encountered previously, Mary transgresses cultural expectations by being a communist. While this is not to ignore her assumptions about Bigger's "people," from wanting him to sing a spiritual with her to wanting to see how "his people live," Mary doesn't subscribe as strictly to the cultural norms as do the other white people Bigger encounters. She threatens Bigger's sense of order by providing a different and fluctuating performance as a white woman than Bigger has been trained to respond to.

Bigger has a very unstable relationship with Mary. As he describes it, "in his relations with her he felt that he

was riding a seesaw; never were they on a common level; either he or she was up in the air" (72). This seesaw is a metaphor for the delicate balance of privilege and inclusion that Mary attempts to provide. Sometimes, Mary tries very hard to perform outside her race, to bridge the divisions between herself and Bigger. Other times, Mary reverts to her standard performances of privileged whiteness destabilize Bigger's sense of social order. Mary does not fail completely from her white performance. She in fact participates in the same forms of white performance as her parents, but while their acts of whiteness provide Bigger with the distance he needs in order to contain his fury, Mary complicates Bigger's world by providing conflicting and changing performances of white womanhood.

One way in which Mary makes Bigger more aware of his place in the cultural order is by trying to create an alliance with Bigger. She tells Bigger, "'I'm on your side.' Now, what did *that* mean? She was on *his* side" (65). Mary articulates the divisions between herself and Bigger, but she sees herself as performing a more inclusive whiteness. This is disturbing to Bigger. What is even more upsetting to him is her sense of inclusion is based on stereotypes and caricatures. As they drive through Bigger's part of town, Mary articulates her assumptions about him and others like him. She says he is living among people who "have such emotion! What a people . . .! And their songs-

the spirituals! Aren't they marvelous?" (76). Just like Bigger's understanding of whiteness, Mary uses her assumptions of blackness based on media depictions to render a black performance.

Mary further disturbs Bigger by her physicality. She is more concrete and less ephemeral than the other white women Bigger has encountered. Where Mrs. Dalton was as white as a ghost, Mary "looked like a doll in a show window: black eyes, white face, red lips" (63). Her outward appearance, unlike the elusive ghostliness of her mother, is like a porcelain doll, a toy to be played with. Her whiteness has tangibility and fragility, whereas Mrs. Dalton's was more distant because of its abstractness. Mary is more real to Bigger, more physically present, and therefore more threatening to him.

While she tries to relate to Bigger, Mary shifts the seesaw by constantly reinstating her power. Right after she states that she and Jan "want to be friends of yours," she tells Bigger to pick her up at eight-thirty the next morning, reminding him that his job is to serve her (75). Even though she wants him to feel as if he is her peer, Mary offers Bigger to Jan, telling him "let Bigger drive you home!" (78). While she and Jan are tired, Bigger, her servant, is always available for her use. When she needs him to serve her, she is no longer on his side. This seesaw makes Bigger feel unstable, causing him to come more into

contact with the seething anger he holds inside. Mary threatens the social order by simultaneously transgressing and returning to her traditional role as white woman.

Jan also threatens this order by transgressing cultural norms and taking part in a breach of cultural definitions of whiteness. When Bigger first meets him, Jan invites Bigger to shake hands. This act, a friendly, socially accepted act among men of the same race, takes on a grand scale in Bigger's mind because it falls outside cultural expectations for behavior between men of different races. As they shake hands, Bigger

felt he had no physical existence at all right then; he was something he hated, the badge of shame which he knew was attached to a black skin. It was a shadowy region, a No Man's Land, the ground that separated the white world from the black that he stood on (67-68).

In transgressing cultural expectations of whiteness, Jan does more than threaten Bigger's job; he calls into question Bigger's entire existence, wiping out from under him the grounding he has in the cultural definitions of white and black performance.

Like Mary, Jan further blurs the lines of color by attempting to take on a black performance. As part of this blending of performances, he and Mary insist that Bigger take them to a "black" restaurant. They want to be surrounded by the markings of blackness. They also try to

take on the persona of black culture by singing a spiritual. As Jan and Mary sing, "'Swing low, sweet chariot, Coming fer to carry me home . . .,'" Bigger sees their act as a failed one, questioning if they can perform his cultural role: "Bigger smiled derisively. Hell, that ain't the tune, he thought" (77). Bigger tries to reinstate divisions, commenting that they cannot perform his role as easily as they think. Once again, Bigger is reinforcing the color line in order to maintain the cultural paradigm of white privilege.

However, because of the cultural instability they cause, Mary and Jan make Bigger more self-conscious of his otherness than the other whites he encounters. In trying to include Bigger, they show him the details of his own cultural performance. "He felt naked, transparent; he felt that this white man, having helped to put him down, having helped to deform him, held him up now to look at him and be amused" (68). They do more than gaze upon Bigger from the outside looking in. Mary and Jan try to cross over to a caricaturized version his performance, calling his social order of division into question. Furthermore, they make the performative acts of whiteness and blackness more visible to Bigger. This shift in Bigger's consciousness makes him even more anxious to reconfirm the social order, an impulse which ultimately leads to Mary's death.

Both Mary and Jan make Bigger aware that he is providing a performance of blackness just as much as they are performing white identity by occasionally trying to treat him as an equal. Bigger's habit of calling white's "Sir" and "Mam", for example, is immediately and frequently corrected by Jan. "'Don't say *sir* to me. I'll call you Bigger and you'll call me Jan. That's the way it'll be between us'" (67). Bigger does not react well to this command to slip from his cultural role; in fact, he finds the alteration in performance difficult to muster: "He scratched his head. How on earth could he learn not to say *yessuh* and *yessum* to white people in one night when he had been saying it all his life long?" (73). His verbal performance of Sir and Mam make Bigger conscious of his difference, and therefore more close to the anger he has tried so hard to suppress.

Jan and Mary also call attention to the performativity of Bigger's identity in their attempt to sing the spiritual, a failed performance in Bigger's eyes, points out the performativity of the act. They also comment upon the likelihood of being taken to a place that is black rather than *acts* black. When they tell Bigger, "we want one of those places where colored people eat, not one of those showy places" (69), they are making him aware of the acts he and other blacks perform. Finally, Mary humiliates him by laughing at his inability to step outside his cultural

role and act more white. "'You know, for three hours you haven't said yes or no.' She doubled up with laughter. He tightened with hate" (80). Her comment and laughter point out Bigger's otherness, but not in the way of her parents. Rather, Jan and Mary's focus on Bigger's performativity creates a space of confusion in which his hatred and anger become tangible. Jan and Mary cause him to feel the very emotions he has tried so hard to suppress. He has tried to be invisible to them because his being seen "would have called attention to himself and his black body. And he did not want that. These people made him feel things he did not want to feel. If he were white, if he were like them it would be different. But he was black" (69). In pointing out his blackness, Mary and Jan prompt an awareness of Bigger's otherness and make him feel outside their world. They make him conscious of his exclusion from their privilege, a feeling which causes him to be angry enough to kill.

Consequently, Bigger's murder of Mary and attempts to blame the crime on Jan become a method of cultural maintenance, of trimming off those who transgress cultural norms and thereby both threaten Bigger's place in those norms and call into question their very meaning. When Bigger tries to remove these transgressive elements from the picture, he is in fact trying to maintain his place within the normative. Bigger's fear of being caught, based on his understanding of cultural definitions of black

malehood, causes him to suffocate Mary without thinking, to blot her out as he had wished to do to so many others because she complicated the simple definitions inherent in the cultural paradigm Bigger adheres to. Her threat to this paradigm makes her a sacrifice to his convictions.

In this way, Bigger's violence is a sacrifice to his ideals of whiteness. Bigger's move to violence, as Jerry Wright describes it in "The Violence of Native Son," comes from his frustration at being separated from the cultural ideals he admires: "closed off from self-fulfillment and self-expression, isolated from the world around him, he turns to violence, becoming, like his contemporaries of the same stamp, a threat to the civilization that produced him" (12). While Bigger's threat to white culture may exist on some level, particularly on the level of physical violence and destruction to property, I contend that Bigger's violence in fact further sanctifies the very system it may seem to jeopardize on the surface. Bigger's violent act enables him to develop his career as a criminal and to more concretely define himself within the culture at large. This form of work, while a site of cultural disruption, more closely binds Bigger to the cultural norms he is attempting to transgress. In this way, Bigger is much the same as Kent describes his creator: as containing a "double consciousness." Kent attributes this sense of "double consciousness" to W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black*

Folk, in which he discusses this sensibility "as the black's sense of being something defined and imprisoned by the myths of whites and at war with his consciousness of American citizenship" (19). Possessing this double-consciousness, Bigger represents two-sides of the same coin; he at once embraces and rejects the white culture.

But Bigger's crime takes on different meaning as the significance of this act sinks in. Waking after he has committed Mary's murder and burned her body, Bigger begins to think that, in trying to maintain his place within cultural norms by sacrificing Mary, he has indeed transgressed them. Bigger's sense of performing his cultural role changes through Mary's murder. While his crime was accidental, Bigger discovers pride in his only self-fulfilling act of work, in his only individual and self-defined creation. He "has created a new world for himself," a world where he can be privileged (226). Bigger sees himself as dwelling outside the cultural order because he has killed Mary:

the thought of what he had done, the awful horror of it, the daring associated with such actions, formed for him for the first time in his fear-ridden life a barrier of protection between him and a world he feared. He had murdered and created a new life for himself. It was something all his own, and it was the

first time in his life he had anything that *others could not take from him* (emphasis added, 101).

Bigger believes his act as murderer has enabled him to transgress cultural definitions and thereby attain the power only whites like Jan and Mary possess. They can transgress cultural norms and still participate in the cultural order. Bigger believes his act gives him power equal to theirs.

In this sense, Bigger finds the privilege of whiteness through his act of violence. It is as if, through murdering Mary, he has gained her privileges. Once this act of violence is performance, Bigger feels he no longer belongs to the African-American community. He feels he has distanced himself from them through the creation of this new world. In his mind, he is as separate from them as whites are. In seeing himself as the owner of white privilege, Bigger believes he has "a natural wall from behind which he could look at them" (101). He no longer defines himself as black. Rather than worrying about maintaining distance from whites, Bigger feels his new world will let him cross-over into white privilege, thus leaving his old cultural identity behind.

As part of his new sense of privilege, Bigger now has the imperial gaze that was previously focused on him. He examines his family from a new distance, seeing them as other:

Suddenly, he saw Buddy, saw him in the light of Jan. Buddy was soft and vague; his eyes were defenseless and their glance went only to the surface of things. It was strange that he had not noticed that before . . . Looking at Buddy and thinking of Jan and Mr. Dalton, he saw in Buddy a certain stillness, an isolation, meaninglessness (103).

In comparing his brother to the privileged whiteness of Mr. Dalton and Jan, Bigger is in essence comparing a younger, pre-murder version of himself to them. Now that he feels he has attained privilege, the meaninglessness he sees in Buddy has been replaced by power within himself.

Part of this sense of power, for Bigger, is the ability to control his own destiny. Where once the "ifs" of Bigger's dream were created by white restrictions on his performance, Bigger now feels he can do anything he sets his mind to: "Now that the ice was broken, could he not do other things? What was there to stop him?" (101). In the new world he has created for himself, the restrictions placed upon him by white culture have been broken. He has the ultimate control. With this control, Bigger takes advantage of the system of racism for his own benefit. Bigger is better able to cover up his crime by using racists perceptions of his inability to commit the crime. His presence in Mary's room, for example, "would have been the last thing [Mrs. Dalton] would have thought of. He was

black and would not have figured in her thoughts on such an occasion" (102). Bigger is now able to recognize race-based assumptions and use them to avoid capture. Bigger therefore begins to "own" the racist system and to use it to his advantage. He can claim innocence because "he was black and she was white. He was poor and she was rich. [Mrs. Dalton] would be ashamed to let him think that something was wrong in her family that she had to ask him, a black servant about it. He felt confident" (122).

The biggest change in Bigger's performance after the murder of Mary is that now he has a secret of value to whites. Where before Bigger feared the secrets they kept from him, Bigger now has a secret they desire to know. Bigger's secret makes his performance within the normative order more difficult, however. "He looked out of the car window and then round at the white faces near him. He wanted suddenly to stand up and shout, telling them that he had killed a rich white girl, a girl whose family was known to all of them" (123). Bigger takes pride in the power of his secret and wants to shout it out to the white world. In articulating his crime, Bigger feels he will gain autonomy.

But Bigger is wrong. He has not gained freedom from his ascribed identity. Instead, he is redefined within cultural norms. Rather than possessing power by taking a white woman's life and brazenly continuing to act "normal," Bigger is found out and reconfigured into terms the white

culture can understand. Although Bigger tries to maintain his criminal act as existing outside the normative, he loses grasp of its reading and is forced to perform once again within cultural expectations of his ascribed identity. While he feels as if "he had a world and life of his own in spite of them" (275), his performance is still interpreted by white culture as the act of "just a scared colored boy from Mississippi" (288) and "a demented savage" (378). As the trial against Bigger develops, Max maintains that Bigger killed as a mode of escape and yet, ironically, this act bound him even more closely to the role expected of him: "Not only had he lived where they told him to live, not only had he done what they told him to do, not only had he done these things until he had killed to be quit of them; even after obeying, after killing, they still ruled him" (307).

Once they suspect Bigger of having committed the murder, Bigger comes to face the feelings he had managed to escape from in the world he created. He has the same "feeling that he had had all his life: he was black and had done wrong; white men were looking at something with which they would soon accuse him. It was the old feeling, hard and constant again now, of wanting to grab something and clutch it in his hands and swing it into someone's face" (106). The feeling of power Bigger had found through killing Mary is now being overtaken by the return of his

sense of powerlessness against the white cultural order. He no longer feels outside his cultural role as a black man; rather he feels once again connected to the black community and ashamed of their powerlessness: "he identified himself with his family and felt their naked shame under the eyes of white folks" (275). For a brief moment, Bigger had possessed the power of the gaze of "white folks;" now he returned to the position of powerless object of interest.

Bigger believes that the comprehension of the power he took in killing Mary will make the white cultural order respect him. However, they manage to erase Bigger's sense of power by attributing this act to Jan, a move which places the power back into whiteness. As one newspaper describes it, "police are not yet satisfied with the account [Jan] Erlone has given of himself and are of the conviction that he may be linked to the Negro as an accomplice; they feel that the plan of the murder and kidnapping was too elaborate to be the work of a Negro mind" (229). The act in which Bigger had taken such pride, the act which was his first act of self-creation, has been excused as the influence of whiteness. Another newspaper, quoting a man from Mississippi commenting upon Bigger's trial, says that Bigger "may have a portion of white blood in his veins, a mixture which generally makes for a criminal and intractable nature" (261). Bigger's violence is attributed to his blackness; it is the intellect behind

his attempt to fake a kidnapping and his ability to elude the authorities for several days, that calls his potential whiteness into question.

Bigger is redefined within the context of black performance, redrawn as a violent predator of white women's virginity. Rather than maintaining his self-defined role as murderer, Bigger is labeled as primarily a rapist. Bigger first finds out about this recategorization when he reads the newspaper:

REPORTERS FIND DALTON GIRL'S BONES IN FURNACE. NEGRO
CHAUFFEUR DISAPPEARS. FIVE THOUSAND POLICE SURROUND
BLACK BELT. AUTHORITIES HINT SEX CRIME. COMMUNIST
LEADER PROVES ALIBI. GIRL'S MOTHER IN COLLAPSE. He
paused and reread the line, AUTHORITIES HINT SEX
CRIME. Those words excluded him utterly from the world
(228).

The white culture, again depicted through the media, repositions Bigger into a role already available in the cultural paradigm: the black rapist of white women. In fact, after he is caught, the headlines read: "RAPIST FAINTS AT INQUEST" (260). The headlines seem to exclude his true act, the performance through which he can find pride and feel a sense of individuality and self-actualization at the core of the work ethic he is estranged from. But the media reinterprets his performance into terms it understands. This headline is followed by a description of

the "sex-slayer" and "how it is easy to imagine how this man, in the grip of a brain-numbing sex passion, overpowered little Mary Dalton, raped her, murdered her, beheaded her, then stuffed her body into a roaring fire to destroy the evidence of his crime" (260). Later, when the case is being made against Bigger in court, the lawyer asserts that "He killed her because he raped her! Mind you, Your Honor, the central crime here is rape! Every action points toward that!" (377). While the white culture finds it inconceivable that Bigger committed this murder alone, they can easily envision that he killed in order to cover up a sex crime. The rape becomes the "central crime" because it is the one crime the cultural order can comprehend within its construction of African-American masculinity.

The media and the white authorities further co-opt the power Bigger has created for himself by removing his identity. In the first newspaper account of Bigger's crime in which he has been made a suspect, Bigger's name is never mentioned; he is merely defined by his working role as "the Negro chauffeur" (209). In another newspaper account, Bigger's name is mentioned twice, while the words "Negro" and "Negroes" are used thirteen times (260-61). His autonomy and self-hood, the new world that Bigger created for himself, have been replaced by the generic. Where once Bigger took ownership for his crime, now his violent act

has been attributed to all like him. When they search for him, in fact, "several hundred Negroes" were arrested (229). He is not an individual but a representative of a cultural role.

The final move in reinstating Bigger's ascribed identity is in taking away his humanity. The ape is a common term used in reference to Bigger. In referring to Bigger as an ape, his privilege is not only erased, so too is his connection to the human race. He takes on animalistic traits in many of the newspaper articles about him: "'he looks exactly like an ape!' exclaimed a terrified young white girl . . . His lower jaw protrudes obnoxiously, reminding one of a jungle beast" (260). Where once Bigger felt autonomy and power, the ability to take on privilege, he has been reduced to an animal outside of the cultural order of whiteness. This removal of power penetrates Bigger's consciousness, making him feel that "maybe they were right when they said that a black skin was bad, the covering of an apelike animal" (256). Bigger feels his failure to maintain the world he has created and his reentry into the white paradigm is a move away from humanity. Rather than possessing power through his violence, he has been renamed as an animal "in the grip of a brain-numbing sex passion" (260). Bigger has failed to maintain the world he worked so diligently to create, the

world that transgressed his role as other. His world has been reclaimed by the white paradigm of racial division.

Early in the novel, Bigger yawns and "his eyes moistened. The sharp precision of the world of steel and stone dissolved into blurred waves. He blinked and the world grew hard again, mechanical, distinct" (19). Bigger's brief grasp of power through his murder of Mary Dalton is similar to this moment. When he feels powerful, the lines of privilege are blurry. "Having been thrown by an accidental murder into a position where he had sensed a possible order and meaning in his relations with the people about him; having accepted the moral guilt and responsibility for that murder because it had made him feel free for the first time in his life," Bigger is making order out of chaos (255). However, just as his vision refocuses and redraws the lines and divisions around him, so too does the normative system rewrite the work Bigger has done. The more Bigger struggles to either delve into white culture or transgress it, the more constrictive the binds of the racist culture become. Whether working as a chauffeur or as a murderer, Bigger's work always serves some purpose in the cultural paradigm of white power. As a chauffeur, Bigger serves his employers and gives them power. As a murderer, Bigger gives them a reason to strike out at the black population by posing a threat to white virginity. Bigger's place, his performative and working

identity, then seems concretely set no matter which road he takes.

In answering "the call of the dominant civilization whose glitter came to him through the newspapers, magazines, radios, movies, and the mere imposing sight and sound of American life," Bigger tries to become a part of this world of privilege. In order to do so, he must suppress his anger at the system at large. In murdering Mary, Bigger thinks he has stepped outside of the world of racial division. He has, in his mind, has created "a world and life of his own in spite of them" (275). This world, in which Bigger takes on the role of privilege, is short lived. Once the dominant culture is made aware of his transgression, it reinstates its power, rewriting Bigger's cultural performance in its own terms.

CONCLUSION

(IN)VISIBILITIES: LOOKING AT WHITENESS

Whiteness is something often ignored, often treated as invisible. Against this backdrop, it is important to examine how the characters discussed in the previous chapters function with visibility and invisibility of whiteness within the context of the critical gaze. For these characters, the gaze takes many forms: from the silent gaze of a political poster to the gaze of the employer to the development of their own sense of looking. The gaze is a powerful tool in all of the novels, for without the gaze, there would be no need to perform whiteness. The characters' awareness of being looked at creates an uneasiness within them, an awareness of the precarious positions of their performances. Conversely, their position as observed creates an anxious desire for difference within the observer. In the language of feminist film theory, these characters grapple with the traditional subject/object relationship of observer and observed.

To understand the impact of the gaze on the characters in these novels and how their positions destabilize visions of the observers, we must first examine the positions from which they are observed. The gaze, as mentioned earlier, is a powerful tool for film criticism, particularly for understanding the position of the observed. In *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, for example, Laura Mulvey locates the gaze within the parameters of patriarchy. As the object of the gaze (be it a male or female observer), the woman

stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning (433).

From this viewpoint, the viewer sees in the female object a lack, specifically of male genitalia. The viewed is the absent, creating a desire and fear in the observer.

When we apply this methodology to the study of whiteness, we see a similar observer/subject relationship unfold. For those who are outside of the definitions of normative whiteness, such as Sara, Jurgis, and Bigger, their position as other represents a social lack to the observer.

Those within white normativity feel comfortable to gaze upon non-whites, so much so that, in some instances, these characters even become invisible. For those who are within or straddling the borders of whiteness, the similarities between observer and observed are highlighted by the viewing act, a state that erupts in an anxious rejection of their sameness. In both instances of this relationship, the complications and instabilities of whiteness are revealed.¹

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the characters in all of these novels are aware of the gaze of white normativity, whether it is from their own community or from the white community in which they are attempting to penetrate. The Knapps in *The Homemaker* are under the scrutiny of the community, the locus of which lies in Aunt Mattie's observations of Lester and Eva's gender roles. Like the Knapps, the Joads are made aware of their slipping whiteness by the gaze of the white community as well as their own reflective gaze upon themselves. Sara and Jurgis face blockages to their quest for whiteness as they come

¹This is not to suggest that whoever controls the gaze controls the racial dynamic. Both the observer and the observed participate in this relationship, as I will explore later in this chapter.

into contact with real whites. Bigger tries to avoid being seen in order to forgo his realization that he cannot enter the white normative world he desires.

The gaze of normative whiteness comes in many forms for these characters. In all of these relationships, we see evidence of the observer and subject anxiety. Many of the characters in these novels encounter the authoritative gaze of the police or the state. For the Joads in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the police are a contentious force, an emblem of the powerful desire to contain the otherness of the white unemployed and disenfranchised. The police are the ones who examine the Joads, who monitor their status outside white normativity. We can see this several times in the novel. When the Joads first arrive in California, they ask one of the tenants at a road-side camp if they can stop there for the night. His response is to stop if you want. They ll be a cop to look you over (275). In other words, they are free to stay there, but they must be warned that the gaze of white authority in the form of the police will arrive.

This position as observed by the police is a new place for the Joads, who only recently lost their normative position within the white community. As Ma tells one of the first officers she encounters, we ain t use ta gettin shoved aroun by no cops (294). They are not familiar with

their new status as outsiders and find the place as observed as threatening to the point of feeling shoved around . Where once the law protected them as whites, now it observes and manages them, reinforcing their position as outside white normativity.

While their feeling of being mistreated is based on their sense of whiteness, the Joads are accurate in reading their treatment as unjust manipulation. With the close proximity in class and race between the observer and observed relationship of the police and the Joads (and other families like them), the police come to realize their own fluctuating whiteness and the possibility of their own slippage into otherness. As Jeff Hopkins notes in *Signs of Masculinism in an 'Uneasy' Place: Advertising for 'Big Brothers,* observing someone similar to the observer destabilizes the position of the observer by connecting that person with the observed:

there is an uneasy pleasure an uneasiness between desire and fear intrinsic to this gaze. This tension between male desire for and fear of the "other" reveals the contradictions and instabilities within the "Same." These instabilities are particularly apparent when the gaze is turned inward upon the Same . . . (online).

Because the observer and observed are similar, the distance between the two dissipates, causing the observer to turn the gaze inward, in some aspects. Hopkins further comments that For males to be the object of their own gaze feminises the 'Same'" (online). We can apply this analysis to the observer/observed relationship between whites, as well. When observing the same, the police see their own weaknesses, their own vulnerabilities. Observing those whose whiteness is slipping creates an anxiety within the police about their own status as white.

The police respond to this by using force and intimidation to keep these reminders of their own instability at bay. As Tom comments, If it was the law they was workin with, why, we could take it. But it ain t the law. They re a-workin away at our spirits. They re a-tryin to break us (381). To the Joads, were the police enforcing the laws of whiteness, the laws that give them privilege because of their race, their behavior would be acceptable. But because the police are trying to keep the Joads from claiming their position as white, trying to break them, their actions are intolerable.

Like the police in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the authorities in *The Bread Givers* also reflect an anxiety about looking upon physically white people who are outside of white

normativity. One example of this is when Sara's father is taken to court for attacking his landlady:

In the high American language the lawyer made a speech to the judge and showed with his hands all those people who looked up to Father as the light of their lives. And then he told the Court to look on Father's face, how it shined from him, like from a child, the goodness from the holy life of prayer (24-25).

The lawyer in this scene defends Sara's father not because of his innocence but because of his otherness. The childlike look on her father's face marks a lack of adult understanding about the culture to which he has immigrated. To dissipate the judge's anxiety about looking upon this man, the lawyer has emphasized this lack in order to facilitate the judge's observation.

While there are few instances of Sara coming into contact with the law, Jurgis has many encounters with the police. Because they have been taken advantage of by government officials, Jurgis and his family try to hide from the gaze of anyone in authority. Early on during his immigration to Chicago, he and his family learn not to trust police officers: the policeman on the corner was beginning to watch them; and so, as usual, they started up the street (33). Marked as untrustworthy by their uniforms, the police

serve as an ever-present viewer for these new immigrants. They are the mark of power that has been used against them. To hide from them is to hide from their judgement.

Once arrested, however, Jurgis cannot avoid their gaze. When the police capture him for beating his wife's rapist, half a dozen of them watch[ed] him . . . On his way to his cell a burly policeman cursed him because he started down the wrong corridor, and then added a kick when he was not quick enough; nevertheless, Jurgis did not even lift his eyes (185). The police demonstrate their animosity toward Jurgis through their violence and quiet judgement. But, to them, Jurgis is not a person; he is merely a representative of the mass of immigrants flooding the city. Their perception of Jurgis as such complicates their anger.

Bigger is just as aware of his position as observed by the law as Jurgis is—even more so. Like Jurgis, Bigger's place as observed is complicated by his status as potential criminal by his white audience. This location is commented on early in the novel by Bigger when he first heads to the Daltons and walks through their white neighborhood: "Suppose a policeman saw him wandering in a white neighborhood like this? It would be thought that he was trying to rob or rape somebody" (45-46). Bigger knows that when the police look upon him, he is instantly categorized as a criminal. As the

police officer describes it for Mr. Dalton, to me, a nigger s a nigger . . . They don t need a chance, if you ask me. They get in enough trouble without it (154).

While the police and the law possess the ultimate power of observation over these characters, their employers also participate in the observer/observed relationship. Like many of the interactions between the law and the characters in these novels, much of the observer s anxiety stems from the similarity between the two parties. The employees represent the long love affair/despair between image and self-image, as Mulvey calls it (61). In seeing themselves reflected in those they employ, the bosses, managers and supervisors in these novels face a distorted mirror; they both recognize their own vulnerabilities while realizing their own power within the employer/employee relationship. This position both destabilizes and reinforces the employer's sense of agency and desire.

We see this relationship quite clearly between Lester Knapp and his employers in *The Home-Maker*. Those in charge of him at work, both his supervisor and the store s owner, gaze upon Lester s difference from themselves: Harvey Bronson [Lester s supervisor] glanced at him and felt irritated and aggrieved by his expression. 'What call has a dead loss like Lester Knapp got to be looking so doggone

satisfied with himself! he thought (81). Harvey's frustration with Lester's expression comes from his own desire to distance himself from Lester. The locus of this failure is Lester's illness. The owner of the store, Jerome Willings, comments upon this when describing Lester to his wife as "that dyspeptic gloom, second desk on the left as you go in" (99). Lester is equated with his illness. Rather than describing him in terms that are close in proximity to those that would describe the observer, Jerome focuses in on Lester's difference from himself. Thus, he places the blame of firing Lester onto Lester's otherness rather than his own dissatisfaction with Lester's performance.

When we look at the employer/employee relationship in the light of the gaze we can even more clearly understand what causes Lester to lose his job. His employers are dissatisfied with his work performance, but why? They never, in fact, mention that Lester's failure at work is a result of his inability to perform the specifics of the job. Rather, it is his demeanor, his social performance, that is being evaluated. In defending his decision to fire Lester, Jerome tells his wife that

it's a crime to let a man stay on . . . like that. It must have been clear . . . after he'd been a month at his desk, that he'd never be anything but a dead loss

in the business-world, what with his ill health, and his wool-gathering, and his tags of poetry! (103-4). Lester's illness and poetic sentiment, as discussed in chapter one, are stigmatized traits for an early twentieth-century American male. This therefore makes Jerome uneasy and causes him to define Lester as a failure in the business-world (coded here as a masculine performance). Lester's failure is enhanced by his position as an observed white male, as Hopkins notes:

To look at another male is, at the very least, to risk admitting pleasure in the image, and at worse, is to identify with the 'feminised male' being viewed; both instances may evoke 'homosexual panic', that is fears that the male viewer himself possesses feminine, and thus homosexual, characteristics (online).

Lester is within the realm of white normativity and is consequently quite similar to his employer but because he is feminized by his illness, Lester's position as observed further dramatizes this homosexual panic. In seeing a white man in an ill/feminine body, Jerome must sever the relationship in order to contain his own homosexual anxiety.

Like Lester, the Joads are also evaluated by employers based on their white performance. The observation of otherness gives employers insight into the Joad's slipping

whiteness. As one of their fellow campers tells them, the men who hire farm workers will evaluate the Joads' desire and need to work before offering anything to them: "You'll be a-campin' by a ditch, you an' fifty other famblies. An' he'll look in your tent an' see if you got anything lef' to eat. An' if you got nothin', he says, 'Wanna job?' (259). If the Joads appear hungry, if they are desperate with the desire to work, the employer will offer them a place.

This observation of need gives more to the employer than hard workers desperate for money. It also provides white workers who are even further distanced from himself. This distance gives the employer a sense of safety from the downfall of the poor whites he sees. Men of property were terrified for their property. Men who had never been hungry saw the eyes of the hungry . . . and they reassured themselves that they were good and the invaders bad (386). In seeing the eyes of the hungry, the employers are reminded of their own vulnerabilities. They must distance themselves in order to avoid facing their own fears. When Tom asks the guards at one work camp if there is warm water, they respond with hostility, appalled that he would have the nerve to request what the normative whites possess: "Who in the hell you think you are, J.P. Morgan? . . . Hot water, for Christ's sake. Be wantin' tubs next . . . They'll be wantin'

clean sheets, first thing we know (515). In seeing the possibility of normalcy among the workers, the employers and their guards project themselves upon the Joads state. The Joads desire for normative comforts, like hot water and clean sheets, enrages the observers because it crosses too closely into their own desires. By choosing those who are desperately poor, the employers can more easily distance themselves from those they employ.

The Bread Givers also reflects the employer/employee gaze and evaluation of the worker. As in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the employer evaluates those who "fit" into their definition of worker. When Sara applies for a job in a laundry, the boss looked at me from his big height . . . [and] growled, I want someone who can swing an iron. And he pointed with his thumb to a husky German woman with giant, red arms, who ironed a white dress with big, steady strokes (160-61). Sara is evaluated by her employer in order to determine if she meets the standards of the job based on her appearance. Her failure to possess these traits causes him to dismiss her. Unlike the previous position of observed for the Joads and Lester, Sara's situation as observed does not create the anxiety of similarity. Rather, it allows the observer to develop the sense of power desired because Sara can be placed in a predefined role as working

other. In other words, Sara's position as employee, in combination with her status as outside white normativity, gives her employer the needed distance to project his desire.

Jurgis works under the watchful eyes of his employers, as well. He initially has no problems getting a job because his body aligns with the vision of the model male worker. Once hired, however, Jurgis is constantly observed by his boss to determine how his work can be manipulated:

There was always the boss prowling about and if there was a second's delay he would fall to cursing.

Lithuanians and Slovaks and such, who could not understand what was said to them, the bosses were wont to kick about the place like so many dogs (77).

This also occurs for the women in Jurgis' family, who work painting cans of food. For them it is not their speed being judged but the amount to be paid:

The girls worked at a long table, and behind them walked a woman with a pencil and notebook, keeping count of the number they finished. This woman was, of course, only human, and sometimes made mistakes; when this happened, there was no redress (125).

This evaluation of the observed makes the workers aware of their place as looked upon. It erases their agency by

placing the judgement of their performance outside themselves. Under the scrutiny of their employers, these workers are constantly reminded of their status as other and of their powerlessness in this position.

Bigger also shares this feeling of powerlessness within his work environment. Like the characters in *The Jungle* and *The Bread Givers*, Bigger is constantly being evaluated for his work performance. His lack of agency in this position is further highlighted by the tendency of his employers to articulate their thoughts about Bigger in his presence. When he is first interviewed by the Daltons, they discuss how they should approach Bigger while he stands by:

I think it s important emotionally that he feels free to trust his environment, the woman [Mrs. Dalton] said. "Using the analysis contained in the case record the relief sent us, I think we should evoke an immediate feeling of confidence . . . But that's too abrupt, the man [Mr. Dalton] said. Bigger listened, blinked and bewildered. The long strange words they used made no sense to him; it was another language (48).

The Daltons clear social difference (superiority, really) from Bigger gives them the feeling that they can discuss and observe Bigger unfettered by the social conventions of

decorum. They do not try to curb their opinions in his presence because his presence is absence. His position is so outside their definition of normalcy for them that he is nearly invisible.

While the law and employers represent a power-based relationship and a certain amount of distancing between observer and observed, the more close observations of the characters' communities are equally illuminating when exploring the impact of the gaze. For those who are (or were) within the realm of white normativity, the gaze of their community can be particularly revealing. The Knapps, for example, are quite aware of the gaze of those around them. When Eva cleans house, she evaluates its cleanliness based on the opinions of others. Her dissatisfaction with the house comes when there is not a room in the house that is fit to look at (9). Her awareness of the gaze of those within the white community is highlighted by her understanding that they are looking at her:

They all looked up from their work, smiling earnestly at her, drawing their needles in and out rapidly, and Evangeline Knapp knew from the expression of their eyes that they had been talking of her, of Lester's failure to make good (57).

Eva is not being paranoid. The members of community often comment among themselves about the Knapps situation. The ladies in the sewing circle were, in fact, talking about Eva and Lester before she arrived.

What makes the Knapps so fascinating for the community is the dichotomy of Eva, who is seen as the ultimate white woman, and Lester, who is seen as the ultimate failure of white manhood. We see this disparity between husband and wife when Mrs. Anderson, the Knapps neighbor, summarizes the opinions of the community as follows: She looked sideways at him . . . Mercy! What a sickly-looking man! Bent shoulders, hollow chest, ashy-gray skin . . . no physique at all. And the father of a family! Such men ought not to be allowed to have children (83). Whereas, Eva is seen as a wonderful housekeeper. The kind who stays right at home and sticks to her job. You never see her out except at church (116). The two of them are polar opposites of white normativity in the view of the community. To the observers among them, the Knapps show a marriage out of balance.

Like the Knapps, the poor families in *The Grapes of Wrath* are also aware of being seen by others in their community. Unlike the Knapps, however, these families are sensitive about being observed as having money. In the community of *The Home-Maker*, Lester is marked as a failure

because he does not provide the comforts of monetary success; in *The Grapes of Wrath*, having money among the poor is seen as breaking the code of their community. For example, when Ma Joad makes stew and allows the begging children of the camp to eat from what is left in their pot, she is reprimanded for sharing the meal: mind your own children an let mine alone, one of the women in the camp tells Ma. I m tryin to feed my folks, an you come along with your stew (353). By sharing her meal with the children in the camp, Ma is seen as bragging about her own monetary success, an act which is reproached because it reminds the others among them of their poverty. Ultimately, this shift represents a reversal of visibility as power. Families in the camps who were very rich or very foolish with their money ate canned beans and canned peaches and packaged bread and bakery cake; but they ate secretly, in the tents, for it would not have been good to eat such fine things openly (270). They must hide their comforts from the rest of the camp in order to prevent their observers from feeling the sting of inadequacy. In order to maintain the balance of equality within the community, food and money are things to hide from those around them. To display them is to step outside the bounds of normality among the poor whites.

The same is true for the community in *The Bread Givers*. When Sara's father is able to match up his daughters with a diamond-dealer and a salesman, the people around him look on with envious desire: I saw groups of people whispering and looking after us, as though their eyes were tearing themselves out of their heads with envy (81). Unlike the Joads, however, their envy is not to be feared by Sara and her family. It is, in fact, what they want. What the Smolinsky family fears most is to be criticized by their community. This is shown when Sara's father says to Bessie, Sara's eldest unmarried sister that, when marrying a man she does not love, she'd have a home, a husband. People would respect her and not point their fingers on her for a cursed old maid that no man wants (95). Sara's father articulates what the rest of the family believes: to be viewed by one's community as successful is the most desired position to possess.

Sara does not share this opinion for long, however. When she leaves the family and moves out by herself, her family fears she will be seen in a negative light by their community: No girl can live without a father or a husband to look out for her . . . In the olden times the whole city would have stoned you, her father tells her (137). Sara realizes she cannot be concerned with what the others think

of her if she wants to accomplish the goal she has set for herself. She must learn to live without their approval, to ignore the taunts of those who make fun of her as she sets out on her own. This new attitude toward the observations of her community culminates when she rejects the tradition of tearing her clothes in mourning: A hundred eyes burned on me their condemnation (255). Although they condemn her for not following tradition, Sara does not abandon her decision to leave her clothes intact. Because of the hardships she has endured, she no longer cares about their observations.

Like Sara, Bigger's community in *Native Son* differs significantly from the communities the Joads and Knapps encounter. However, because he is living in the black ghetto, Bigger's observers and his awareness of their gaze forces Bigger to acknowledge his alienation from the norm and his lack of power in the white community. We can see this when Bigger goes to the restaurant with Jan and Mary and is seen by people he knows: "Cautiously, Bigger looked around; the waitresses and several people at other tables were staring at him. They all knew him and he knew that they were wondering as he would have wondered if he had been in their places"(73). Among Jan and Mary, Bigger sticks out, an observation that is reinforced by the gaze of his peers.

Being observed *among* his peers is equally threatening to Bigger's sense of self. When his family comes to visit him in prison, Bigger is forced to face his own otherness: the kind words of Jan and Max were forgotten now. He felt that all of the white people in the room were measuring every inch of his weakness. He identified himself with his family and felt their naked shame under the eyes of white folks (275).

While the position as observed is often problematic for the characters in these novels, they also possess a certain desire to be observed in specific ways. As bell hooks notes in *The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators*, there is the potential of control within the position of observed: even in the worse circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency (308). This agency, this power, is what the characters in the novels under discussion crave. For some, they hope to be observed as white in order to attain the position as observer, in order to transform into whiteness. Yet, for others, they desire to be seen as *outside* of whiteness in order to highlight the vulnerability of the observer. While their position as observed is often

problematic (for both viewer and viewed), what the characters fear most is to *not* be seen, to become invisible.

Invisibility is a complicated issue within the analysis of whiteness. As Dyer notes, whiteness is the sign that makes white people visible as white, while simultaneously signifying the true character of white people, which is invisible (*White*, 45). For those within normative whiteness, their status is as non-racial, as non-colored, in Dyer's words, as invisible. But, as the cultural center, as the norm against which all else is measured, the presence of whiteness is pervasive. However, to be ignored, to be invisible, is a by far different state than to be an underlying part of the culture. Invisibility, in this sense, is the lack of the gaze, the absence of observation, a state that subjugates these characters so far from the center that they are no longer visible. While being observed draws out anxiety and self-reflection, to be ignored can potentially mean death.

For the Joads, the desire to be seen is often minimized by their need for privacy, as discussed in the earlier chapter. However, according to the narrator, many of the families like the Joads desire to be seen in order to avoid starvation and, finally, death. To prevent their demise, these characters desire to be seen as an emblem of what the

country has become, as a sign that society must change in order for whites to be successful: The wants of the Okies were beside the roads, lying there to be seen and coveted (318). Their poverty serves as a warning to those who pass by. These families, according to the narrator, desire to be seen because it gives agency to their position. Ignored, no one can see what has become of those who were once normative whites. To be viewed in their current state, they can join together in the fight against the culture that has repressed them:

One man, one family driven from the land . . . And in the night one family pulls in and the tents come out. Here is the node . . . keep these men apart . . . This is the zygote. For here "I lost my land" is changed; a cell is split and from its splitting grows the thing you hate - "We lost *our* land" (206).

To see each other and to be seen together creates a community of poor whites, bringing them together and giving strength in numbers. This connection among others gives these families agency, an agency they can only possess if seen.

The fear of invisibility is also strong for Sara. As with the families in *The Grapes of Wrath*, to be observed is by far more effectual than to be ignored. Much to Sara's

chagrin, she is overlooked by the other students on the college campus:

I looked at these children of joy with millions of eyes. I looked at them with my hands, my feet, with the thinned nerves of my hair. By all their differences from me, their youth, their shiny freshness, their carefreeness, they pulled me out of my sense to them.

And they didn't even know I was there (213).

Her fellow students see no worth in observing Sara. To them, she is as meaningless as a tree or bench on their way to classes. She does not even have the significance to receive their gaze.

Jurgis also desires the gaze of white normativity because, as with the families in *The Grapes of Wrath*, this gaze might provide a remedy to his family's poverty. Like Sara, however, Jurgis and his family are generally ignored by those who could help them: He and all those who were dear to him might lie and perish of starvation and cold, and there would be no ear to hear their cry, no hand to help them! (140). As an invisible member of society, as someone outside the white norm, Jurgis fears that if his family's demise is ignored, this would cause them to ultimately disappear in the most finite way: to die.

Like these characters, Bigger desires the gaze of white normativity in order to gain agency. While his need to be seen stems from his fear of death, his motivation is not to be rescued, as it is for Jurgis, or to join forces with others like him, as it is for the Joads. Rather, Bigger's need to be seen by the white community stems from his desire to undermine their vision of him and thereby reclaim his life. As discussed in the previous chapter, after having committed his crime against Mary, Bigger feels he has gained agency over his destiny; he has stepped outside the prescribed performance of black identity. But, this action is worthless to Bigger without being seen by the white community. Bigger wants them to see him and his crime so that they are forced to face their own disillusionment with the black/white order. On the bus to work the day after he has killed Mary,

He looked out of the car window and then round at the white faces near him. He wanted suddenly to stand up and shout, telling them that he had killed a rich white girl . . . He wished that he could be an idea in their minds; that his black face and the image of his smothering Mary and cutting off her head and burning her could hover before their eyes (123).

Bigger wants to use his crime to fracture their vision of him in order to gain control over his own life. In other words, Bigger's crime could allow him to rise from the dead/invisible. The irony is, of course, that his crime ultimately brings about Bigger's execution.

The position as observed is problematic for both those who observe and those who are observed in these novels. For the observers gazing upon those who are similar, the observed are a reminder of their own vulnerabilities. For those who are observed, being looked upon can be a heavy responsibility. The characters in these novels are constantly aware that they are being looked at, whether it be from the powerful position of the law or the employer or from within their own community. This observed/observer relationship can therefore not be ignored because it carries so much import for all involved. As seen from the following conversation between Sara and her sisters, this position as observed is to be valued:

You're a young girl, Sara; why don't you put on a little style?"

I haven't time or money for the outside show."

"The outside show? What else do people see? (174).

The outside show, the performance of one's cultural identity, as has been discussed throughout this work, is all

that others see. However, one must be seen in order for this performance to be evaluated. In other words, without an audience to gaze upon these characters, their performances, whether they be in or out of white normativity, are meaningless.

REFERENCES

- Anon. "East Side Street Vendors." *New York Times*. 30 July 1893. Reprinted in Brodtkin, 1998, 29.
- Babb, Valerie. *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture*. New York: New York UP, 1998.
- Benston, Kimberly W. "The Veil of Black: (Un)masking the Subject of African-American Modernism's *Native Son*." *Human Studies: A Journal for Philosophy and the Socially Sciences* 16 (1993): 69-99.
- Bourke, Joanna. *Dismembering the Male*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996.
- Brodtkin, Karen. *How Jews Became White Folks and What that Says About Race in America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1998.
- Bryant, Jerry H. "The Violence of *Native Son*." *Richard Wright: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Arnold Rampersad. New Century Views. New York: Prentice Hall, 1995.
- Buell, Lawrence. "Postcolonial Anxiety in Classic U.S. Literature." Eds. Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt. *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2000.
- Canfield, Dorothy. *The Home-Maker*. Chicago: Harcourt Brace, 1983.
- Carafoil, Peter. "'Who I Was': Ethnic Identity and American Literary Ethnocentrism." Ed. Henry B. Wonham. *Criticism and the Color Line: Desegregating American Literary Studies*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1996.

- Collins, Douglas. *Photographed by Bachrach: 125 Years of American Portraiture*. New York: Rizzoli, 1992.
- Cooke, Michael G. "The Beginnings of Self-Realization." Ed. Michael Cooke. *Afro-American Literature in the Twentieth Century: The Achievement Of Intimacy*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1984.
- Davy, Kate. "Outing Whiteness: A Feminist/Lesbian Project." Ed. Mike Hill. *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*. New York: New York UP, 1997.
- Diaware, Manthia. "Black British Cinema: Spectatorship and Identity Formation in Territories." *Screen 29* (1988).
- Dyer, Richard. *White*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- . "White Man's Muscles" Ed. Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel. *Race and the Subject of Masculinities*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997.
- Frankenberg, Ruth. *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993.
- Ginsberg, Elaine K. Introduction. Ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg. *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*. Durham: Duke UP, 1996.
- Hahn, Robert. *Sickness and Healing: An Anthropological Perspective*. New Haven: Yale, 1995.
- Harris, Alice Kessler. Introduction. *The Home-Maker*. New York: Persea Books, 1975.
- Hartigan, John. "Establishing the Fact of Whiteness." Eds. Annalee Newitz and Matt Wray. *White Trash: Race and Class in America*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Herndl, Diane Price. *Invalid Women: Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction and Culture, 1840-1940*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1993.
- Hill, Mike. "Can Whiteness Speak?" *White Trash: Race and Class in America*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

- hooks, bell. "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators." Ed. Sue Thornton. *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*. New York: New York UP, 1999.
- Ings, Katherine Nicholson. "Uncovering the Hidden Hand." Ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg. *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*. Durham: Duke UP, 1996.
- Jacobson, Matthew. *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999.
- Kaplan, Amy. "Romancing the Empire: The Embodiment of American Masculinity in the Popular Historical Novel of the 1890s." Eds. Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt. *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2000.
- Kent, George E. "Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture." Bryant, Jerry H. "The Violence of Native Son." *Richard Wright: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Arnold Rampersad. New Century Views. New York: Prentice Hall, 1995.
- Kivisto, Peter. *Immigrant Socialists in the United States: The Case of the Finns and the Left*. London: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1984.
- Lingis, Alphonso. *Foreign Bodies*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Lorber, Judith. *Gender and the Social Construction of Illness*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, CA, 1997.
- Lott, Eric. *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. New York: Oxford UP, 1993.
- McDowell, Doborah. "Pecs and Reps: Muscling in on Race and the Subject of Masculinities." Eds. Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel. *Race and the Subject of Masculinities*. Durham: Duke UP, 1997.
- Miller, Peter and Julia Scully. *Disfarmer: The Heber Springs Portraits 1939-1946*. Danbury, New Hampshire: Addison House, 1976

- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. *Feminisms*. Rutgers UP: New Brunswick, 1991.
- Nelson, Dana D. *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men*. Durham: Duke UP, 1998.
- . "'No Cold or Empty Heart:' Polygenesis, Scientific Professionalization, and the Unfinished Business of Male Sentimentalism." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 11.3 (1999).
- Newitz, Annalee and Matt Wray. "What Is 'White Trash'? Stereotypes and Economic Conditions of Poor Whites in the United States." Ed. Mike Hill. *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*. New York: New York UP, 1997.
- . *White Trash: Race and Class in America*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Oates, Joyce Carol. "Imaginary Cities: American." Ed. Michael Jaye and Anne Watts. *Literature and the Urban Experience*. Rutgers UP: New Brunswick, NJ, 1981.
- Roediger, David R. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. London: Verso, 1999.
- . "White Looks: Hairy Apes, True Stories, and Limbaugh's Laughs." Ed. Mike Hill. *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*. New York: New York UP, 1997.
- Rothstein, Arthur. "Children of Rehabilitation Clients, Yakima, Washington, 1936." *Portrait of a Decade: Roy Stryker and the Development of Documentary Photography in the Thirties*. F. Jack Hurley. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1974.
- Rust, Marion. "Speaking of Olaudah Equiano." Ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg. *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*. Durham: Duke UP, 1996.
- Sinclair, Upton. *The Jungle*. New York: Penguin, 1986.

- . *The Way Out: What Lies Ahead for America*. Los Angeles: Published by the Author, 1933.
- Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath*. New York: Penguin, 1992.
- Towers, Frank. "Projecting Whiteness: Race and the Unconscious History of 19th-Century American Workers." *Journal of American Culture*. 21 (1998).
- Uebel, Michael. "Men in Color: Introducing Race and the Subject of Masculinities." Eds. Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel. *Race and the Subject of Masculinities*. Durham: Duke UP, 1997.
- Wilentz, Gay. "Cultural Mediation and the Immigrant's Daughter: Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers*." *MELUS: The Journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 17 (1991-1992): 33-41.
- Wilson, Christopher. *White Collar Fictions: Class and Social Representation in American Literature, 1885-1925*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1992.
- Wright, Richard. *The Ethics of Living Jim Crow*. New York: Viking, 1937.
- . *Native Son*. New York: Harper and Row, 1989.
- Yezierska, Anzia. *The Bread Givers*. New York: Persea Books, 1975.